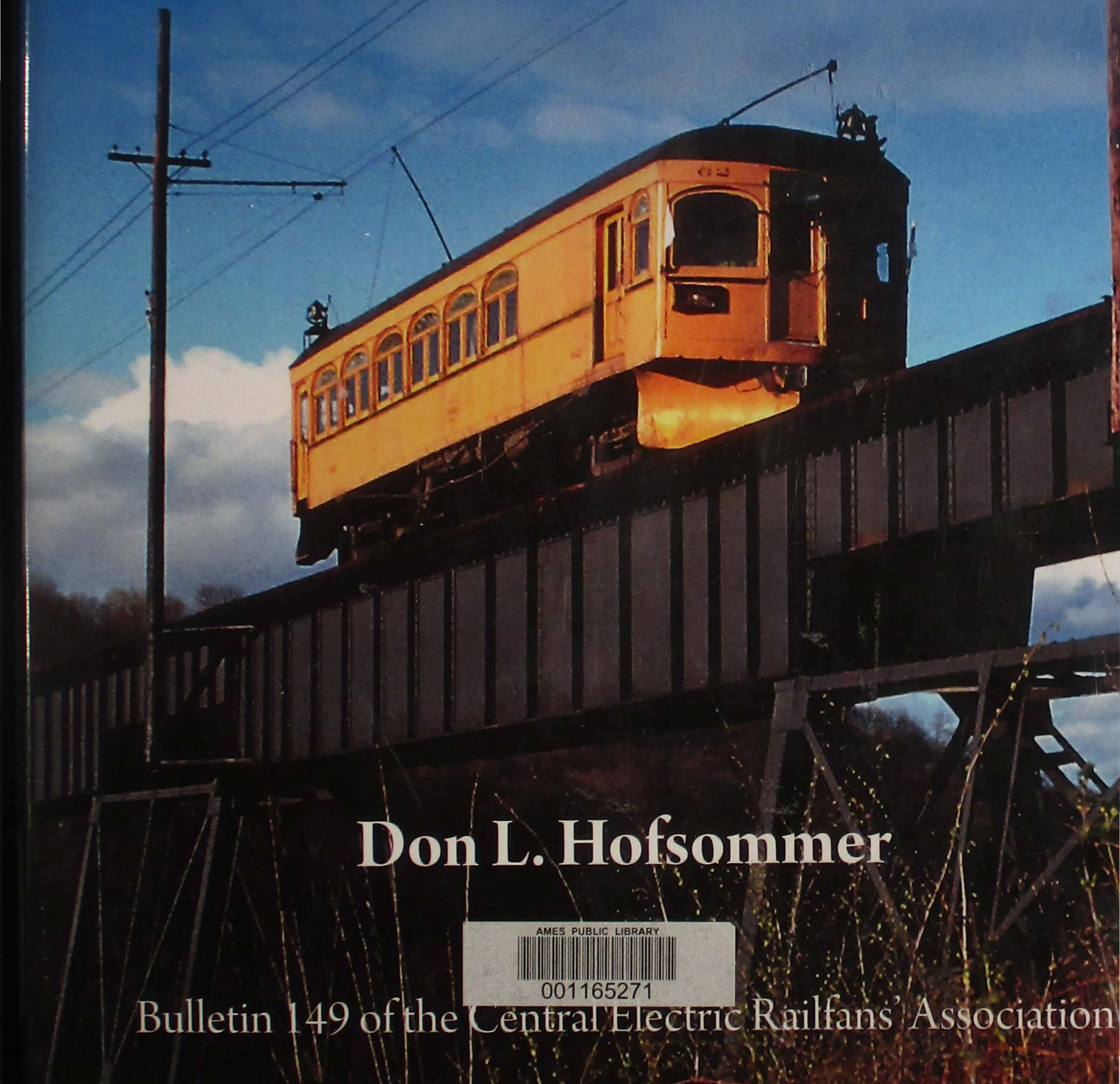
THE FORT DODGE LINE

Iowa's Feisty Interurban



Don L. Hofsommer

Bulletin 149 of the Central Electric Railfans' Association

A WORD ABOUT CERA

The Central Electric Railfans' Association (CERA) was formed in 1938 to encourage the study of the history, equipment, and operation of urban, suburban, interurban, and main line electric railways. CERA is incorporated in Illinois as a not-for-profit technical and educational society.

Publication of "Bulletins" on electric railway topics is an important facet of CERA. This book is the 149th in that number series. CERA also holds meetings in Chicago about ten times annually, each devoted to some aspect of electric railroading.

Occasional inspection trips provide an opportunity to view the inner workings of electric railways. All CERA activities are open to the general public as well as members.

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THE NEWTON

RIGHT FRANKLIN

WEBSTER CITY

ALDEN STA.

CENT

ILL

ABBOT

ELDORA

GRUNDY CENTE

JEWELL

WESTERN

ELDORA JC.

NORTH

GIFFORD

STORY CITY

CENTRAL R.

R.

IOWA

NORTH

CEN. R.

MINERVA JC.

CHI.

MARSHALLTOWN

AMES

NEVADA

NORTH WESTERN

STORY

MARSHALL

STATE CENTER R.

STATE CENTER JC.

IOWA

MADRID

N.

SLATER

ST. PAUL.

MELBOURNE

PICKERING

IOWA

P.C.JC.

R. W.

RIVER.

CLIVE

VALERIA

GT.

COLFAX

CHI.

ROCK ISLAND

PAC.

NEWTON

R. W.

POLK

JASPER

CHICAGO

CHI. ROCK I'D & G

IOWA CEN. R.

WABASH

R. W.

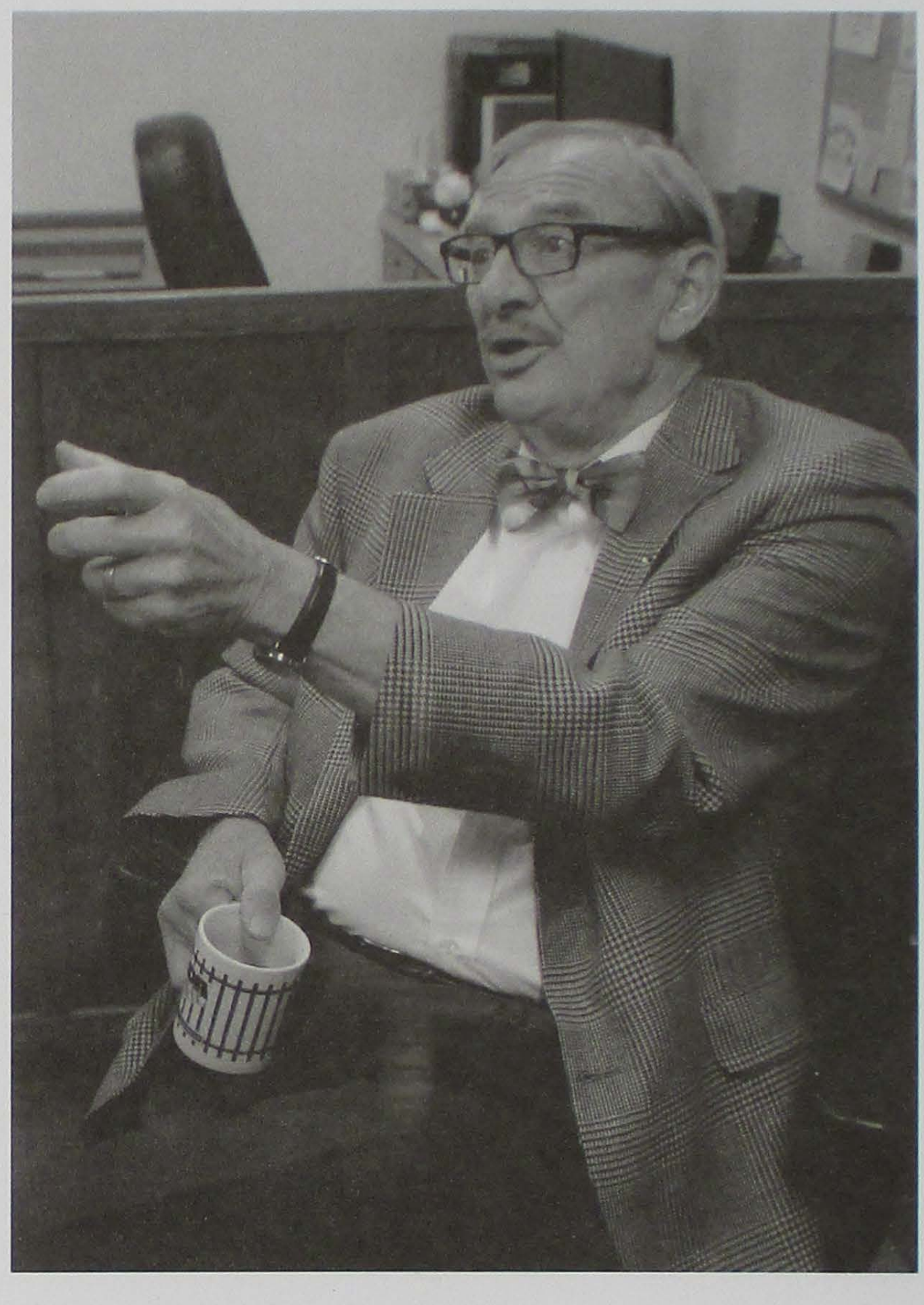
VALLEY JC.

DES MOINES

MONROE

PAC

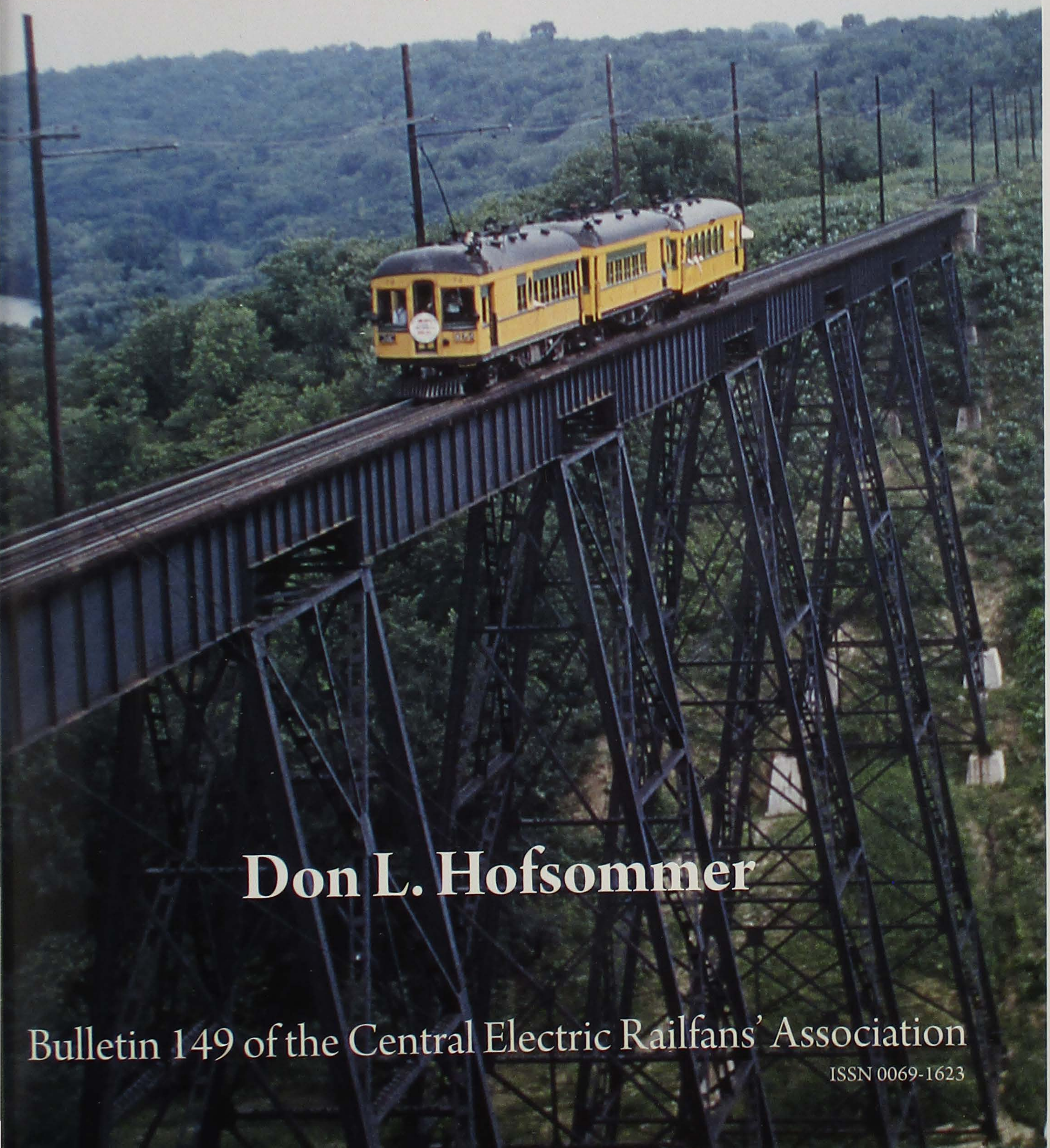
LYNNVILLE



For Roger B. Natte,
Lifelong friend
and fellow historian.

THE FORT DODGE LINE

Iowa's Feisty Interurban



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By Don L. Hofsommer

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PREFACE

We lived in Iowa, at Callender, sixteen miles southwest of Fort Dodge where my father managed the S. Hanson Lumber yard. He was obliged to attend periodic meetings in Des Moines and occasionally Mom and I would tag along, but, this being a time of World War Two and rationing of rubber tires and gasoline, getting there by auto was out of the question. Callender was served by Minneapolis & St. Louis--its Minneapolis-Fort Dodge-Des Moines artery--but M&StL's nightly train was its only offering and was scheduled southbound at 5:20 a.m., not an attractive hour. Instead of utilizing that service dad more often arranged for a friend to drive us a few miles east to Lundgren where he could flag a downbound "interurban"--a bilious contrivance operated by Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway. Those cars inevitably were packed with passengers but the genial conductor always seemed to find a seat for my mother, often sending Dad and I to the baggage compartment ahead. That, of course, put us close to the motorman and gave us an opportunity to admire his skills as well as an opportunity to gaze ahead through front windows at an onrushing right-of-way. Dad always smiled in recounting a trip on "the interurban," saying that you really got your money's worth--going as far side to side and up and down as you went forward. And it was a rocky if exhilarating ride. A change in occupation for Dad took us from Callender to Fort Dodge in 1944, but that change required even more frequent trips to Des Moines--inevitably by way of the Fort Dodge Line. And even after the war and after we left Fort Dodge it was not unusual for us to use "the interurban" as part of our trip to Iowa's capital city. Indeed, we developed a great affection for the road, its curiously romantic cars, and its most accommodating employees.

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern evolved from Newton & Northwestern, a steam road, was electrified and, yes, was for a time a typical interurban operation with a parade of cars zipping up and down the line to the great service and pleasure of eager passengers. But that era passed quickly and, for that matter, FtDDM&S had been built and designed to operate much as a traditional steam railroad with primary focus on soliciting and handling a heavy freight traffic. It did, then, have something of a split personality although freight dominated and paid most of the bills. A crucial adjunct was the company's large generating plant at Fraser that not only supplied power for the trolley line but likewise produced surplus electricity that was sold to massive gypsum mills near Fort Dodge in addition to on-line or nearby communities--in the process providing the firm with "auxiliary income." FtDDM&S, like other Iowa roads, grew up with the state, prospered when the state prospered, suffered when it did not. And, while it connected with nearly all of the state's trunk roads and often acted like its larger brethren, Fort Dodge Line always was a short line railroad that for most of its existence happened to be electrified. As a short line company it could be and it was lighter on its feet than the big fellows, and offered freight customers a much more personalized or tailored service. Grain brokers at Fort Dodge, for instance, favored FtDDM&S over rival M&StL to or through Des Moines because the short line was more responsive to their needs.

Not surprisingly, Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern was buffeted by trends and currents across its history over which it had little or no control, eventually giving up on the passenger trade and electrified operation, passing to "outside control" during the Salzburg years, then to ownership and operation by much larger Chicago & North Western, and finally yielding to the scrapper's torch with only tiny bits of former FDL track remaining today.

Its record, its life, must be understood against the broad experience of the nation and the state during the twentieth century, against the experience of the nation's railways and the interurban sidebar that was part of the industry's overall fabric, against the general experience of Iowa's steam and electric roads, and, most assuredly, against the relentless onslaught of the motor car craze. In the end, the experience of Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern was, ironically, at the same time distinctive and typical.

Several persons have provided generous assistance for this project. These include Kim Niles, Norman Carlson, Gregory P. Ames, Edward A. Burkhardt, Geoffrey H. Doughty, Nick Fry, William D. Middleton, John F. Humiston, William Armstrong, Pam Schwartz, Susan Hubbs, and Michael Joynt. St. Cloud State's Mary Ramacher smilingly executed a seemingly endless chain of interlibrary loan requests and Ann Anderson did her usually fine job of preparing the manuscript. Lifelong friend Roger B. Natte provided valuable source material and vigorous encouragement. To all the above and to others whom I might have regrettably overlooked, I am indebted. For errors of fact and infelicity of style, I alone am responsible.

Contents

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1

Coal

Coal—that wonderful carboniferous treasure, as one writer put it—was found in much of Iowa, but mining was initiated in only twenty-six of the state's ninety-nine counties—many of them in or near the Des Moines River watershed. From 1880 well into the next century coal mining would rank just behind agriculture as the state's major industry. [1]

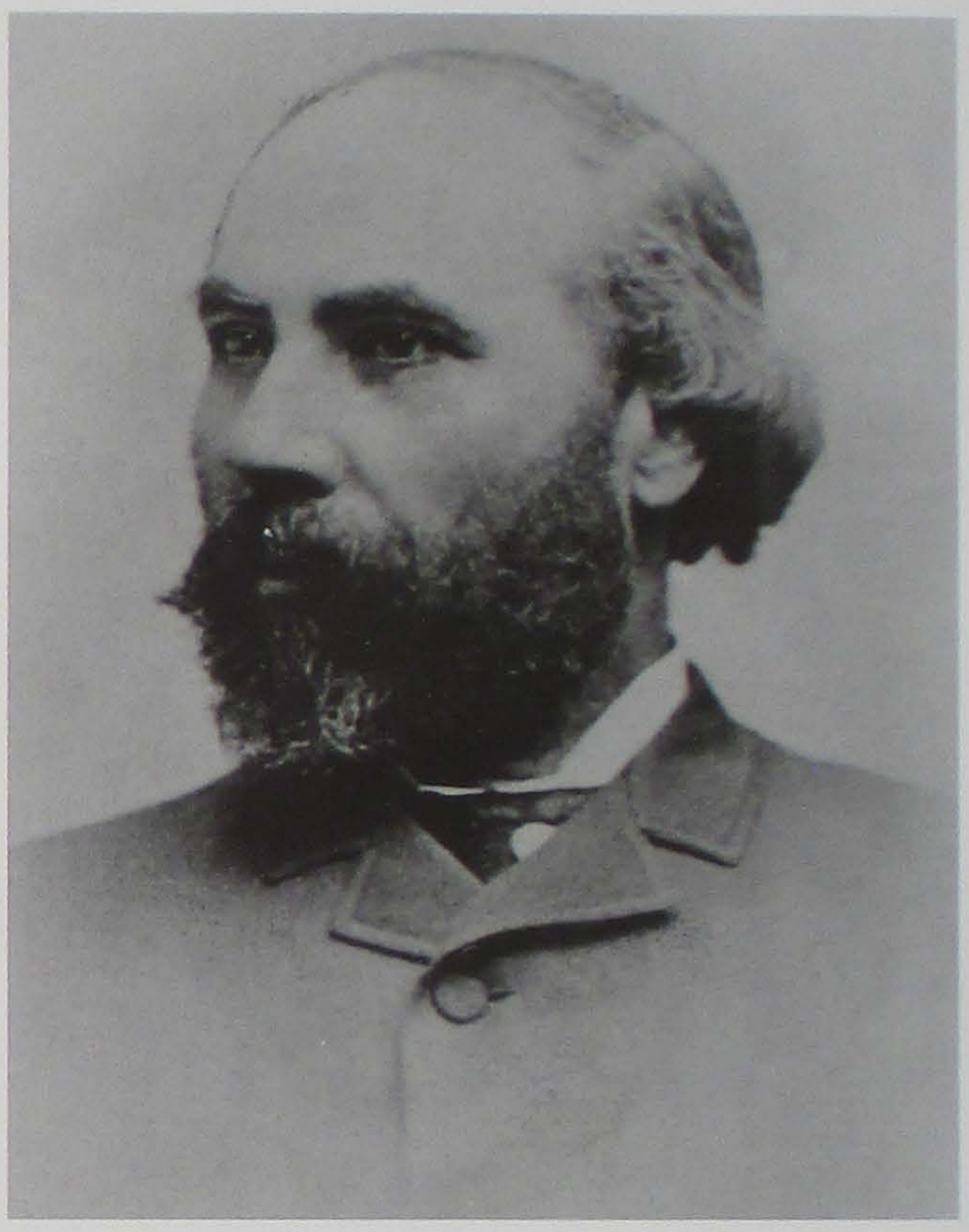
Above: Coal for many years would rank just behind agriculture as Iowa's major industry and sparked any number of industrial and commercial enterprises up and down the Des Moines River watershed.

It was the prospect of tapping coal reserves in Webster County and beyond plus strategic impulses that in 1880 provoked Minneapolis-based Minneapolis & St. Louis (M&StL) to complete a line southwestward to Fort Dodge (an Illinois Central predecessor had ushered in the steamcar civilization for the area with an important cross-state artery eleven years earlier). Webster County mines in 1880 produced 128,712 tons—some of it billed from producers near Kalo and destined for coal yards at various M&StL stations, some to Northwest Fuel Company of Minneapolis, and some to M&StL as locomotive fuel. But the supply was inadequate. "There is not half-coal enough on our line to supply the demand," admitted M&StL's general manager. "The wonderful growth and extension of railroads throughout the West in the last year, and the opening up and settlement of a large amount of new territory have caused a largely increased demand for fuel." And the Webster County coal fields were not

large. M&StL pushed on in 1881 from Kalo with a new line out of the Des Moines River valley through rolling countryside before crossing Chicago & North Western's (C&NW) busy Chicago-Council Bluffs artery at Ogden and then burrowing on a few more miles to Coaltown—in 1883 to be renamed Angus, in honor of R. B. Angus, an associate of railroad mogul James J. Hill—259 miles from Minneapolis. [2]

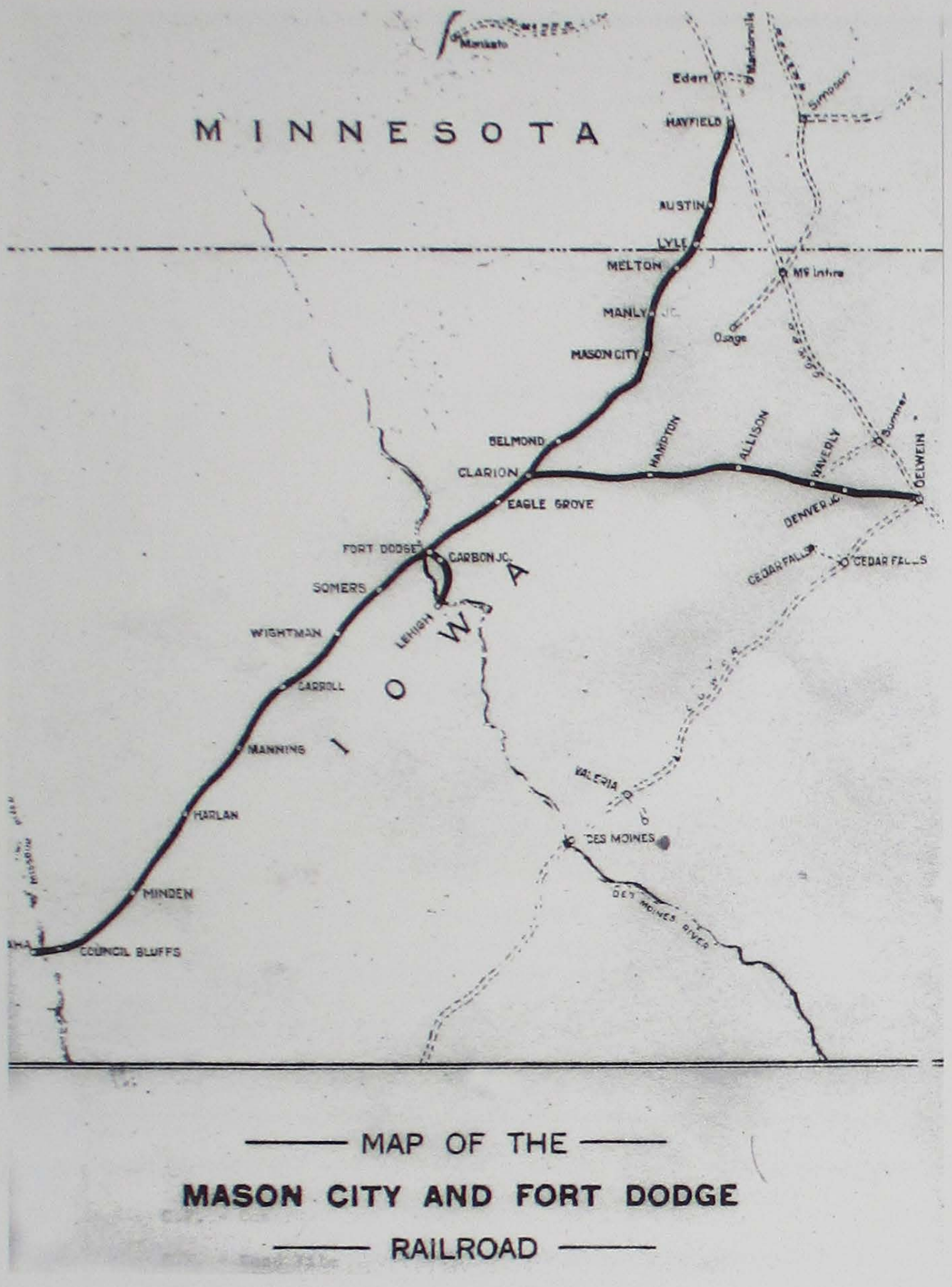
For a while, Angus was an extremely important coal camp, a hub of activity for the mines scattered nearby in Boone, Greene, and Dallas Counties. Perhaps three thousand persons—two thousand of them miners working for Climax, Eagle, or any of several other companies—called Angus home at its apex. James J. Hill and associates were early and important players in this region, with substantial coal-bearing lands and Climax Coal Company itself. In 1883, however, C. H. Pettit of Minneapolis, representing several personalities who at the time controlled M&StL, had sought to acquire these several properties and threatened to establish new mining operations in competition. Hill's group responded by selling their assets to St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba, in which they were principals, to supply locomotive fuel. That arrangement lasted only briefly. And when M&StL increased the rates from Angus to Minneapolis, Hill quickly determined to secure Manitoba's coal elsewhere. [3]

Meanwhile, Angus boomed. Switch engines scurried to spot empties, pick up loads, and make up trains. The roundhouse, servicing locomotives, was always busy as were the saloons—perhaps eighteen of them on "whiskey row," where booze was dispensed to miners who seemed to live a by a simple code: live hard, drink hard, and die hard. When Methodists put up a church and installed a preacher whose views on alcoholic consumption were contrary to their own, miners set the place afire, torching the nearby jail for good measure. After that hilarity, however, matters went downhill. When a strike broke out in 1884, strikebreakers were imported from Minneapolis; a riot ensued and the militia was summoned from Des Moines to restore order. Angus was never the same. Moreover, the coal field was being depleted. Climax shut down in 1886; Eagle and Standard followed in 1887, with Keystone ending production in 1889. Smaller operators persisted, though, and a new mine was opened at the northeast edge of Rippey in 1888. Production at Angus temporarily spurted in 1890 and mining persisted at Angus and Rippey into the next century. But the bloom was off. The Angus Exchange Bank failed in 1893, and two years later the town's population was down to 493. Abandoned lots were sold for taxes and reverted to farmland. [4]



Above: James J. Hill--"The Empire Builder" of railroad fame--for several years had great interest in Iowa coal fields and in railroads serving them.

Hill's irritation with M&StL and the inability of mines served by M&StL to meet the insatiable needs of fuel-starved Minnesota led Hill and those associated with him to look for alternate or additional sources in the Des Moines River Valley from near Fort Dodge to the area east of Angus toward Boone. Hill at some point likely sought acquisition of M&StL for those purposes but powerful Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific gathered control of M&StL and that option perished accordingly. In any case, Hill came in contact with one Hamilton Browne whose fingerprints would appear on several central Iowa enterprises over the next several years.

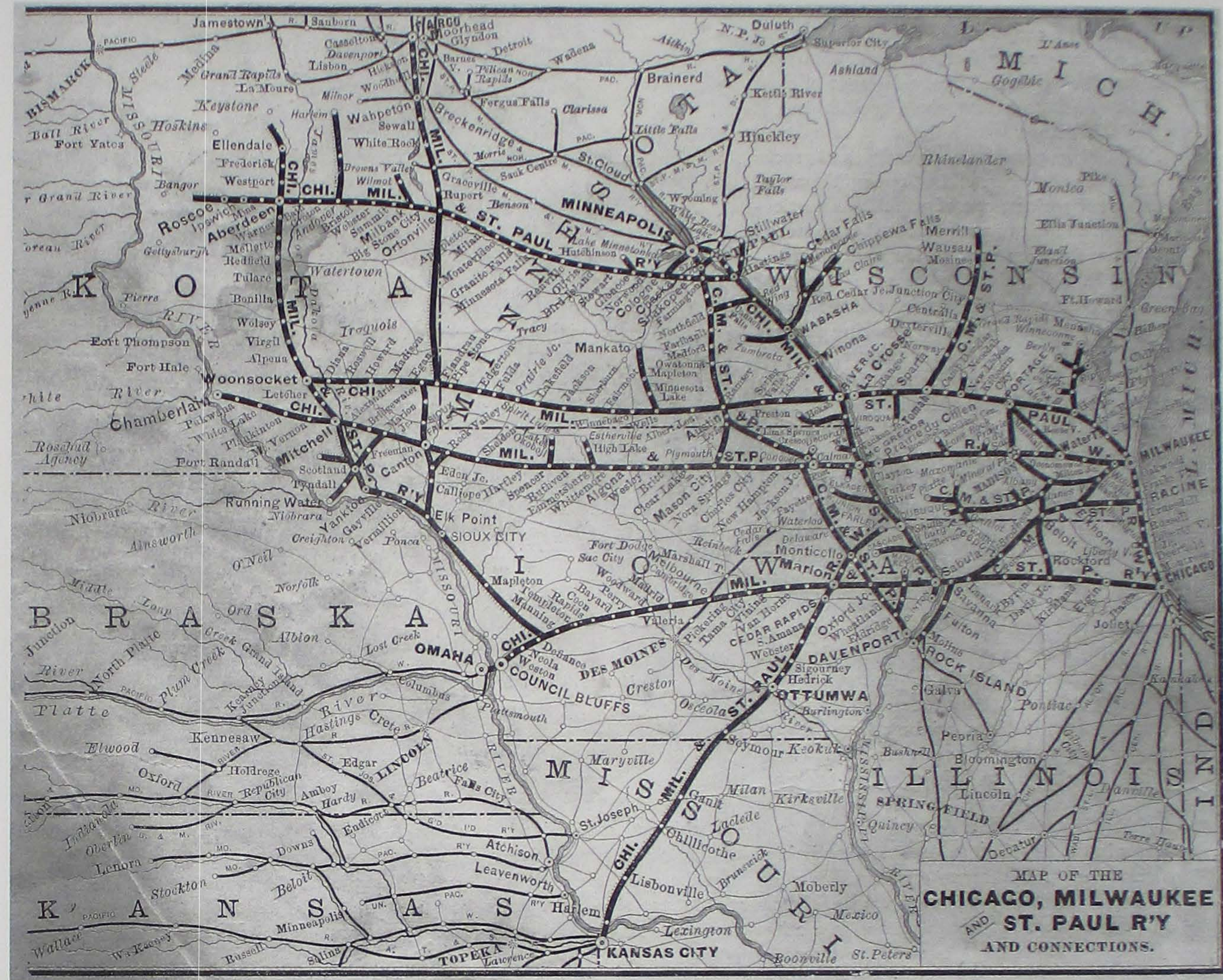


Above: The fingerprints of Hamilton Browne could be found all over Mason City & Fort Dodge and on many other Iowa enterprises large and small.

Hamilton Browne, the enthusiastic and enterprising son of the federal land commissioner in the area, would serve as Hill's man on the scene and he would also see to his own endeavors. Hill was president of Climax Coal, which, of course, had had holdings at Angus, and Browne was a members of its board of directors and served on its executive committee. In 1882, H. A. Foster, an acknowledged coal expert, entered into an agreement with Browne and Hill for the purpose of prospecting for coal across central Iowa. Net profits, if any, were to be equally divided. In the end 5,000 acres were prospected from which three tracts were selected—Coal Valley, Milford, and Pilot Mound fields, 1,560 acres in all. Clyde Coal Company, headquartered at Moingona, was formed in the summer of 1882 to exploit these patches—James J. Hill as president. (Clyde would be sold to another party in 1886 but reconveyed to Hill and Browne later.) **5**

For James J. Hill the matter of getting Iowa coal from its sources to Minneapolis and St. Paul and beyond was as frustrating as it was irritating. This led him quite predictably to support a new rail route to Fort Dodge from Mason City, one county below the Minnesota border, and by connection at Mason City with an existing route all the way to the Twin Cities, Hill could forge a new chute. Thus was born Mason City & Fort Dodge Railroad, organized on May 23, 1881, but not to lay a rail until 1885. To its diagonal eighty-eight-mile route from Mason City through Fort Dodge to Lehigh, completed on November 1, 1886, would be added another four miles, Carbon Junction to Coalville, purchased from Fort Dodge Coal Company in 1886. Local men initially populated the Mason City road's officer corps (Hamilton Brown, vice president) and board of directors (Browne was one of these) but Hill's interests were well protected although his name did not appear officially "to avoid calling attention of any Chicago lines to the matter." Again Browne had been and would continue to be Hill's man, active in right-of-way matters as well as local financial and commercial arrangements. **6**

But all did not go well at Mason City & Fort Dodge. It had failed to birth in a timely manner after incorporation and by the time it was completed coal marketing variables had changed. Now eastern coal was increasingly landed at Duluth and distributed



Above: Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul was at the time one of the bluest of blue chip railroads. James J. Hill tried to interest CM&StP in the Mason City & Fort Dodge—to no avail.

widely within Minnesota and beyond, and now Illinois Central delivered copious amounts of Illinois coal to much of central and west central Iowa at rates that Lehigh and Coalville mine owners could not match. And Hill's own St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba increasingly fed locomotive fireboxes with Illinois coal. Sources of traffic other than coal for Mason City & Fort Dodge were problematic. "The road runs through a very fine agricultural country... which is as yet but partially developed," reported the road's general manager in 1890, "there being a large amount of wild land still in the hands of speculators and non-residents." Future increases in agricultural production would, of course, "mean more business for our road." But the emphasis was on future. Meanwhile Railroad Commissioners of Iowa were advised that the road "has barely paid operating expenses." Hamilton Browne urged two important line extensions as a means of improving the company's financial health and/or making it more attractive to a potential suitor: "northeast of Mason City for 30 miles and also 48 miles southwest of Lehigh to connection with to connection with [Chicago] Milwaukee & St. Paul Road at Templeton." Browne saw the northern extension as making Mason City & Fort Dodge attractive to Winona & Southwestern which, in fits and starts, was pushing a line southwestward from the Mississippi River at Winona, Minnesota to Osage, Iowa; the move to Templeton might provoke the Milwaukee Road to use MC&FtD as a way to link two of its cross-state routes in Iowa. Said Browne: "I would contract to build either or both extensions." 7

Above: In the end, Mason City & Fort Dodge would be parceled off to Chicago Great Western which knitted it together with other of its parts, and with new construction, created a rather impressive system with important end points at Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Kansas City, and Council Bluffs/Omaha. CGW's massive bridge at Fort Dodge soared over the Illinois Central in the immediate foreground, Minneapolis & St. Louis just beyond, and the Des Moines River.

Hill and associates early and late wanted out of the Mason City & Fort Dodge venture but the Panic of 1893 came on and nothing could be done with it until better times returned. In 1898, Hill dickered seriously with management of Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul for sale of MC&FtD if extended from Lehigh to Milwaukee's Chicago-Council Bluffs line at any of several locations—Templeton, Dedham, or Coon Rapids among others. Milwaukee certainly was interested and partially motivated by active rumors that Illinois Central planned an important branch from just west of Fort Dodge to Council Bluffs/Omaha. In the end, however, a deal would be cut in 1901 to sell MC&FtD to Chicago Great Western which knitted it together with other parts and new construction in a way that created a rather impressive system with end points at Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Kansas City, and Council Bluffs/Omaha. [8]

In all of this Hamilton Browne was studying, learning, poking about variously, making contacts near and far, and exploring prospects on his own and with others.

MAP OF THE
IOWA CENTRAL
RAILWAY & CONNECTIONS.
1904

MINNEAPOLIS
ST. PAUL
MINNESOTA
IOWA
WISCONSIN
ILLINOIS
NORTHWOOD
MANLY JC.
MASON CITY
MASON CY. JC.
ALGONA
CORWITH
BELMOND
HAMPTON
ACKLEY
ABBOTT
GIFFORD
MINERVA JC.
MARSHALLTOWN
STORY CITY
STATE CENTRE
STATE CEN. JC.
NEWTON
DES MOINES
LYNNVILLE JC.
NEW SHARON
OSKALOOSA
MONTEZUMA
GRINNELL
NEWBURG
HEDRICK
GIVIN
ALBIA
MORAVIA
OTTUMWA
BRIGHTON
WINFIELD
MORNING SUN
KEITHSBURG
SEATON
ELADOR
MONMOUTH
NEMO
ABINGDON
LONDON MILLS
FARMINGTON
TIVOLI
EDEN
IOWA JC.
RAILWAY
ALBERT LEA
ROCHESTER
WINONA
LA CROSSE
DAVENPORT
ROCK ISLAND
MADISON
MILWAUKEE
PEORIA
CHICAGO
ST. JOSEPH
CENTRAL
Sauk Rapids
Princeton
Harris
Taylors Falls
Turtle Lake
Cameron Jc.
Weyhauser
Prentice
St. Cloud
Becker
Wyoming
Elk Riv.
Stillwater
Bloomer
Chippewa R.
Willmar
Hopkins
Hudson
Hersey
Menomonie
Chippewa Falls
Eau Claire
Hutchinson
Norwood
Chaska
Mendota
Hastings
Glencoe
Merriam
Red Wing
Red Cedar Jc.
Neillsville
Winthrop
Farmington
Randolph
Northfield
Redwood Falls
St. Peter
Waterville
Wabasha
Merrillan
Black Riv. Fs
Junction
Clintonville
Stevens Pt.
Dexterville
Grand Rapids
New London
Sleepy Eye
New Ulm
Zumbrota
Faribault
Plainview
Mankato
L. Crystal
Owatonna
Waseca
Dodge Cen.
Hayfield
Chatfield
Rochester
Winona
Tomah
Sparta
Camp Douglas
Winona Jc.
La Crosse
La Crescent
Renova
Preston
Austin
Taopi
Lyle
Glenville
Albert Lea
Jackson
Elroy
Viroqua
New Lisbon
Princeton
Ripon
Brandon
Portage
Winneconne
Crete
Oshkosh
Butterfield
Winnebago Cy.
Wells
Reno
Barabco
Richland Cen.
Horton
Watertown
Estherville
Spencer
Burt
Titonka
Forest Cy.
Decorah
Waukon
Calmar
Prairie du Chien
Wisconsin
Dodgeville
Montford Jc.
Waukesha
Lancaster
Mineral Pt.
Evansville
Janesville
Elkhorn
Monroe
Beloit
Rockton
Rockford
Freeport
Kittredge
Galena
Cascade
Monticello
Maquoketa
Savanna
Polo
Davis Jc.
Genoa
Cortland
Rochelle
Dixon
Aurora
Amboy
Earlville
Mendota
Joliet
Colona
Walnut
Buda
La Salle
Bureau
Mazon
Streator
Anaconda
La Rosa
Pontiac
Fairbury
El Paso
Bloomington
Gibson
Rankin
Harvard
Fonda
Rolfe
Latimer
Alexander
Geneva
Iowa Falls
Eldora
Ft. Dodge
Dayton
Carroll
Jefferson
Manning
Perry
Guthrie
Atlantic
Winterset
Cumberland
Indianola
Creston
Osceola
Afton Jc.
Chariton
Clarinda Jc.
Clarinda
Mt. Ayr
Bethany Jc.
Grant City
Conception
Darlington
Pattonsburg
Gallatin
Gault
Milan
Kirksville
Hurdland
La Plata
Glenwood
Medill
Waterloo
Independence
Oelwein
Eldon
Mt. Pleasant
Burlington
Ft. Madison
Keokuk
Warsaw
Carthage
Dallas
Bushnell
Lewistown
Vermont
Rushville
Beardstown
Clayton
W. Quincy
Quincy
Tipton
Stockton
Cedar Rapids
Linn
Vinton
Pickering
Murphy
Sumner
West Union
Waverly
Oneida
Dubuque
Maquoketa
Clinton
Fulton
Lincoln
Decatur
Pekin
Delavan
Havana
Atlanta
Leroy
Tuscola
Marcia
Sterling
Rock Falls
Fulton
Clinton
Rochelle
Dixon
Aurora
Amboy
Earlville
Mendota
Joliet
Walnut
Colona
La Salle
Buda
Bureau
Mazon
Streator
Anaconda
La Rosa
Pontiac
Fairbury
El Paso
Bloomington
Gibson
Rankin
Harvard
Fonda
Rolfe
Latimer
Alexander
Geneva
Iowa Falls
Eldora
Ft. Dodge
Dayton
Carroll
Jefferson
Manning
Perry
Guthrie
Atlantic
Winterset
Cumberland
Indianola
Creston
Osceola
Afton Jc.
Chariton
Clarinda Jc.
Clarinda
Mt. Ayr
Bethany Jc.
Grant City
Conception
Darlington
Pattonsburg
Gallatin
Gault
Milan
Kirksville
Hurdland
La Plata
Glenwood
Medill
Waterloo
Independence
Oelwein
Eldon
Mt. Pleasant
Burlington
Ft. Madison
Keokuk
Warsaw
Carthage
Dallas
Bushnell
Lewistown
Vermont
Rushville
Beardstown
Clayton
W. Quincy
Quincy
Tipton
Stockton
Cedar Rapids
Linn
Vinton
Pickering
Murphy
Sumner
West Union
Waverly
Oneida
Dubuque
Maquoketa
Clinton
Fulton
Lincoln
Decatur
Pekin
Delavan
Havana
Atlanta
Leroy
Tuscola
Marcia
Sterling
Rock Falls

2

The Newton

The United States in 1900 was excitingly vibrant. The population was nearly 76 million; Iowa claimed 2.231 million of those persons. Average per capita income led all nations, and unemployment was negligible. Railroads dominated the national economy with 195,526 miles of track—9,180 of it in Iowa—and railroad assets made up about $14.5 billion of America's estimated $90 billion total wealth. Only agriculture exceeded railroads in the amount of invested capital and in the value of annual business. [1]

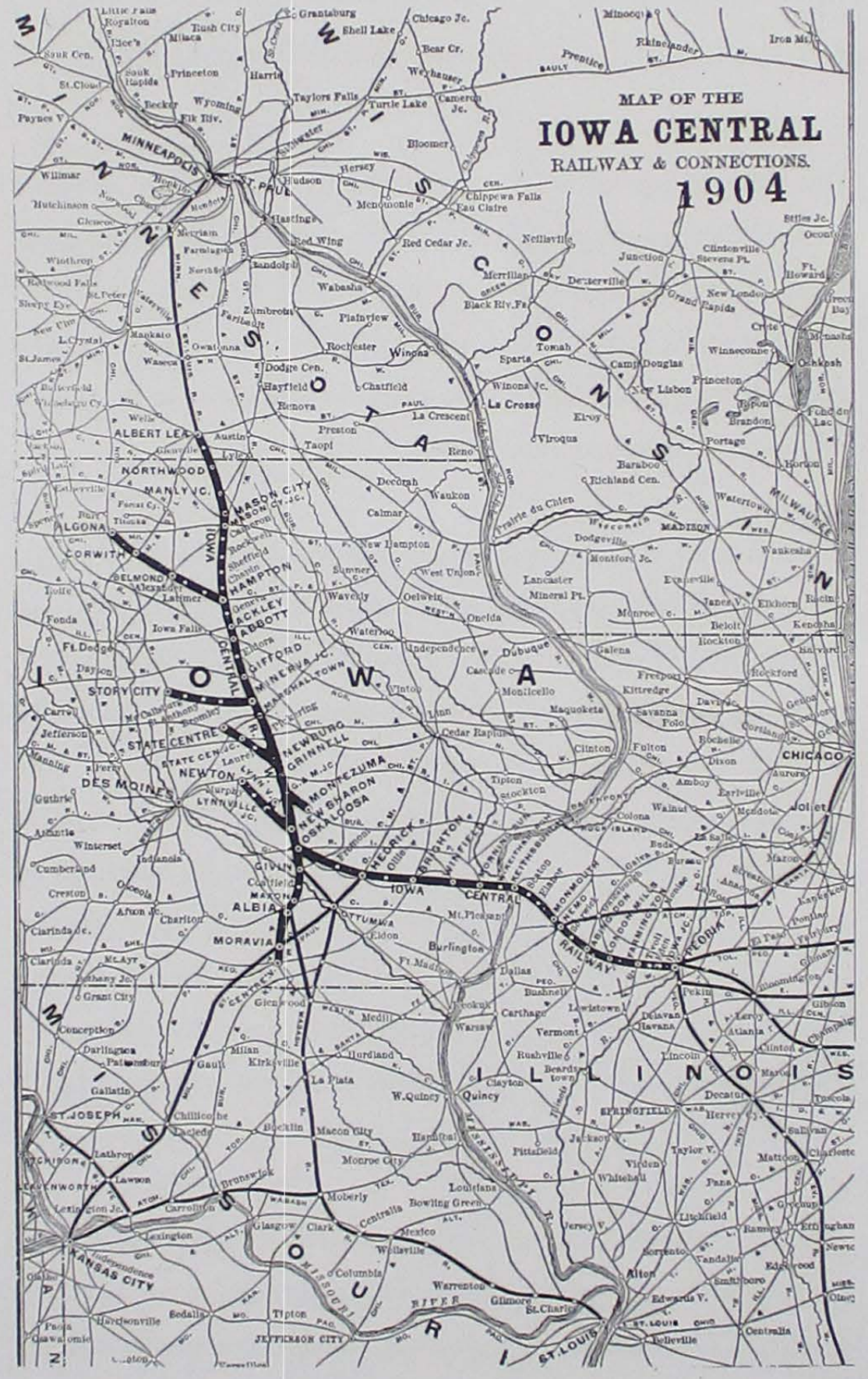
Advocates of laissez-faire economics and practitioners of social Darwinism continued to advocate unbridled competition across an unregulated environment as appropriate public policy. But the general populace was uncertain. A burst of merger activity in the railroad field had followed the Spanish-American War; within two years' time at least 40,000 miles of railroad were transferred to companies owning other lines. Nothing new in this, of course; consolidations and mergers long had been elemental to American railroading. What was new and unsettling to a rising body of critics was the speed and magnitude of recent developments whereby giant chunks of the national network came to be held by particular syndicates.

The wave of amalgamation seemed unstoppable. In 1901 was created United States Steel—the country's first billion dollar corporation—and in that same season railroad moguls and titans of banking fought a high stakes dual to gain control of blue chip Chicago, Burlington & Quincy which owned a powerful presence in Iowa. CB&Q in the end passed to control of a syndicate headed by railroader James J. Hill and banker J. P. Morgan instead of another group of associates led by railroader Edward H. Harriman and the Kuhn-Loeb banking firm. In the process these warring parties agreed to propagate a holdingcompany—Northern Securities—which quickly attracted the scorn of President Theodore Roosevelt who successfully brought suit to dissolve the new creation, earning for himself the "trustbuster" reputation. CB&Q, nevertheless, was ever after owned by Great Northern and Northern Pacific, both controlled by Hill-Morgan at the time, although Burlington management continued to have very considerable managerial latitude. [2]

Edward Harriman had come out second best in this struggle with Hill, but Harriman and his allies already had control of both Illinois Central and Union Pacific; soon they would also gather in sprawling Southern Pacific. And Harriman's domain might have reached right into Hill's backyard of Minneapolis and St. Paul if he had acquired Minneapolis & St. Louis. That road a decade earlier had passed to a consortium of New Yorkers headed by Edwin Hawley who at the turn of the century dangled M&StL for Harriman's consideration. Nothing came of it. Instead Hawley took control of hapless Iowa Central and it was simply a matter of time before that property would be amalgamated with M&StL (1912). [3]

In 1900 the railroad network covered nearly all of the country, with only an occasional pocket remaining for potential growth. Construction, nevertheless, remained brisk during the first decade of the new century—aggregating 47,093 miles across

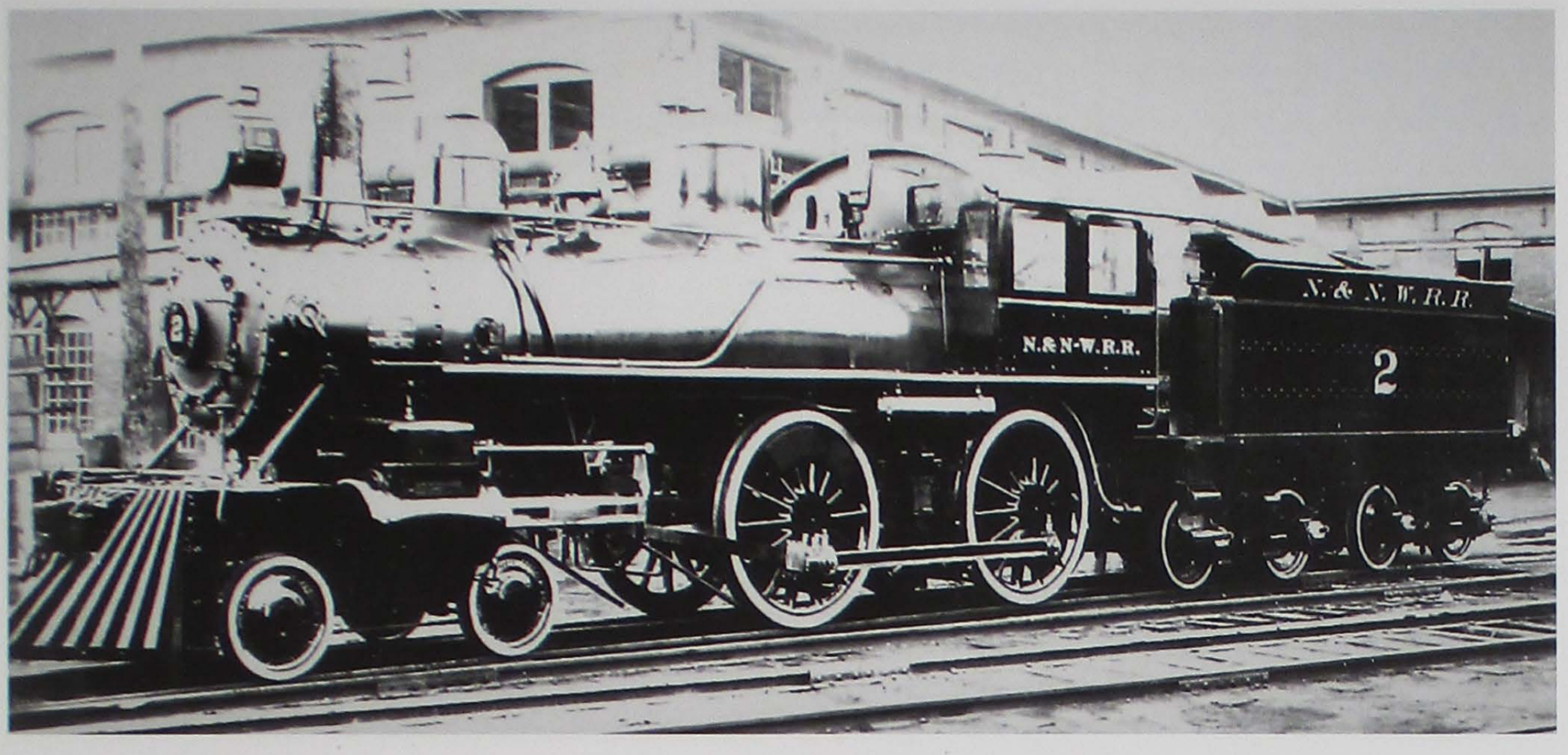
the nation. In Iowa, most—but not all—activity was found in the west central and northwestern portions. The *Des Moines Leader* in January 1896 had boasted that the capitol city had become "pre-eminently the railroad center of Iowa" with lines radiating "from the city like spokes of a wheel..." 84 passenger trains arriving or departing daily. For that matter, continued the *Leader,* "the state of Iowa ... gridironed as it is with railroads" meant that there was "but one point in the state that is fourteen miles from a railroad line . . ." Additions to the state's net in the years following only added to Iowa's expansive service. Indeed, mileage in 1909 stood at 9,747, ranking fourth among all states, trailing only Texas, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. And the construction era was not over. Not surprisingly Hamilton Browne was in the thick of it. [4]



Above: Rampant rumors had Iowa Central thrusting any one or more of its branches westward in ways that might have impact for the dreams of Hamilton Browne.

Browne was born in New York but raised at Des Moines where his father, be it recalled, served as agent for the Des Moines River Land Office, a large operator on his own hook in Iowa lands, and was in a position to meet any number of the era's high rollers. Young Browne served in the Quartermaster Corps of the United States Army during the Civil War as a clerk on steamboats running between St. Louis and New Orleans and afterward was employed by the Atlantic & Pacific Steamship Company. He returned to Iowa in 1872 and began to purchase coal lands, to develop them, and to deal as a land broker. In 1880, he went through bankruptcy, but two years later he had purchased over 10,000 acres of Iowa land—most of it coal bearing—in the name of somebody other than his. Principal among those names was James J. Hill but the list also included some of Hill's prominent associates—George Stephen, Donald Smith, R. B. Angus, Samuel Thorne, John S. Kennedy, and D. Willis James, important business personalities. From 1874 forward into the next century Browne wrote to Hill almost every day and in detail while gathering data on Iowa coal lands, obtaining options, purchasing properties, evaluating coal qualities and quantities, sinking shafts, operating mines, marketing production from those mines, and performing other services as varied as purchasing teams of horses and even hunting dogs. It was Hill and his associates who bankrolled Browne in joint ventures as well as business opportunities on Browne's personal behalf—this, curiously, despite the fact that neither dividends on stock nor interest on bonds typically were forthcoming. [5]

As some of the mines near Boone played out, Browne prospected for new and richer fields to the north and west along the Des Moines River. Thus was born in 1893 the Boone Valley Coal & Railway (BVC&R), reflecting dual purposes of mining coal and carrying it away to market. This latest iteration from the fertile mind of the genetically enthusiastic and chronically optimistic Hamilton Browne drew support from Hill and friends but it was an operation primitive in the extreme. The spindly three-mile track from the nascent townsite of Fraser and area mines reached outward and upward to a place boldly labeled Fraser Junction (later named Wolf) and connection there with Minneapolis & St. Louis which was encouraged to run its own locomotives to BVC&R's loading centers but, after examining Browne's primitive track structure declined that operating challenge. Thus BVC&R



Above: Newton & Northwestern no. 2, a prim 4-4-0 "American" class locomotive was ready for service over the new railroad. *Jasper County Historical Society*

for a time was forced to drop empty cars down the steep grade ("number three hollow") by gravity and then inch loads up that fierce grade by teams of horses. Relief came in the form of locomotive number one, a decrepit leaky steamer affectionately dubbed "Nancy" by its crew. [6]

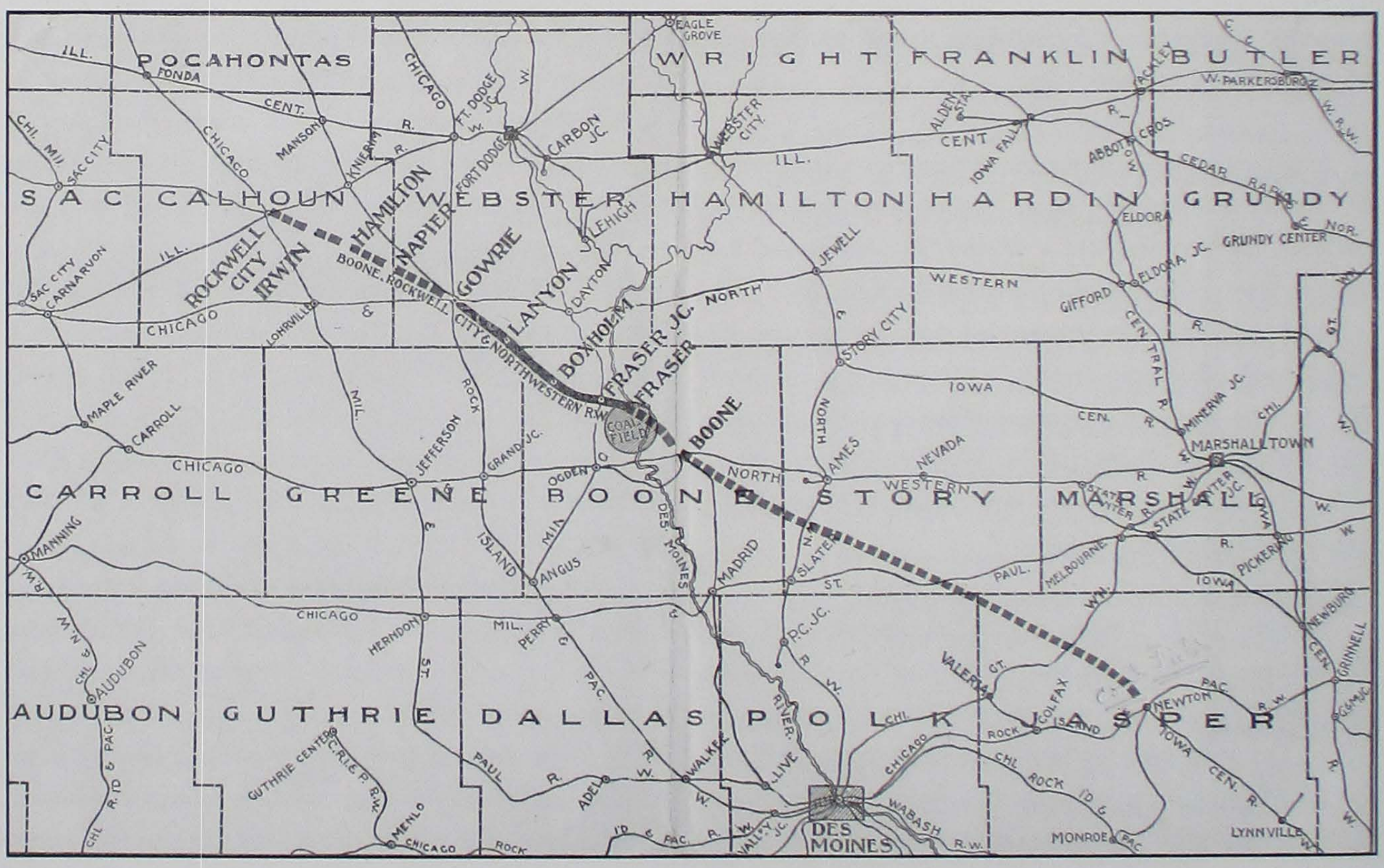
Fraser was platted in September 1893 by Browne and named for Norman D. Fraser of Chicago, one of Browne's investors, BVC&R's vice president and a director. BVC&R owned the company store and most of the residential dwellings which were rented to the miners—an arrangement typical of the time. By 1915, Fraser's population would be 1,243 souls who supported four churches, numerous businesses—meat markets, groceries, pool and billiards, drugs, cobbler, blacksmith, physicians, a sawmill, an undertaker, hardware, four saloons, the Fraser House Hotel—and a school of nine grades. [7]

In May 1895, Browne saw to incorporation of the Marshalltown & Dakota Railway (M&D) with rights to build and operate a road from connection with Iowa Central Railway at Story City and angling northwest through Fraser (utilizing tiny BVC&R), Gowrie, Manson, Pocahontas, Laurens, Hartley, and Sibley into southeastern South Dakota. Almost simultaneously the *Fort Dodge Chronicle* vigorously asserted that Iowa Central itself would extend from its vertical axis main gut the existing branch from Marshalltown to Story City and "on to this place [Fort Dodge], adding, tantalizingly, that Iowa Central "has for some time been considering the plan of building from Belmond" (at the west end of another of its branches from Hampton) "to Pocahontas Center" but maybe to Fort Dodge instead. So what did motivate Hamilton Browne in this Marshalltown & Dakota venture? To expand marketing opportunities for Boone County coal? Perhaps. But the output of coal from those fields varied little in the 1890s—267,310 tons in 1893, 316,756 tons in 1896, and 290,525 tons in 1899. (BVC&R handled about half of that tonnage in fiscal 1897.) In any event, the awful Panic of 1893 was abroad the land and Browne found no way to exercise this new dream until the pall of economic distress passed on. When that happened, Browne in January 1899 deeded Boone Valley Coal & Railroad to Marshalltown & Dakota and then hustled for money adequate to drive construction from above Fraser Junction northwestward to Gowrie, 20.7 miles, with scheduled service beginning on November 15, 1899. Now Browne had three connection outlets (M&StL at Fraser Junction, and Des Moines & Fort Dodge and Chicago & North Western at Gowrie). In the process, capitalization was rejiggered, the number of shareholders expanded from six to sixteen, and in fiscal 1899 the road earned $11,642 against expenses of $5,675. [8]

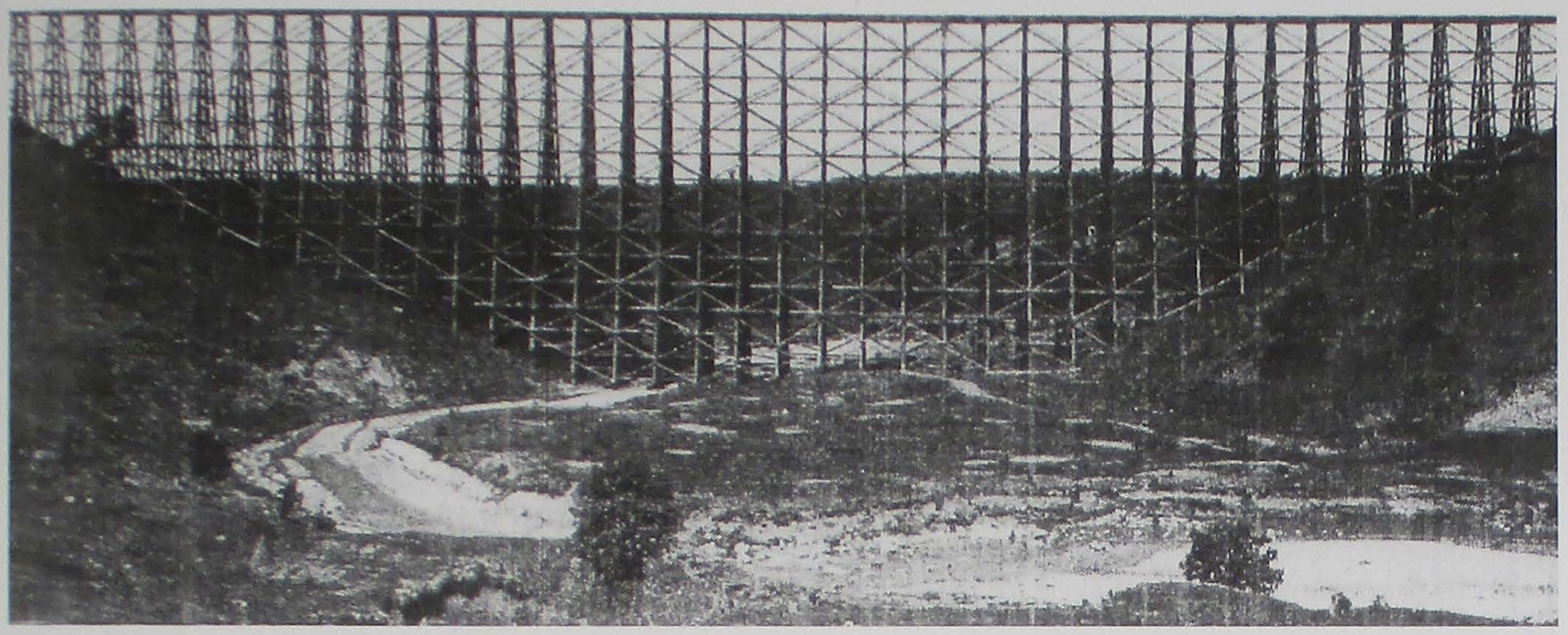
That was enough to activate even greater dreams in the fertile mind of Hamilton Browne. In 1899, Boone Valley Coal & Railway—its rights and operation—were deeded to Marshalltown & Dakota and in August Browne announced that the company would be pressed northward from Gowrie to Rockwall City although, *Railroad Gazette* cautioned, not farther "for several years." And, *Gazette* noted, M&D was "understood to be built in the interest of Iowa Central." [9]

Iowa Central clearly was interested in drawing more traffic to its north—south main stem and presently announced plans to push its Hampton—Belmond spur on to Algona-not to Fort Dodge as leaders there once had hoped—an accomplished fact by November 1, 1899. Boosters at Estherville and Spirit Lake, further to the northwest, fully expected Iowa Central soon to continue on to those places. For that matter, Iowa Central quickly was otherwise occupied, known to be in play, and then passed to control by Edwin Hawley and those allied with him at Minneapolis & St. Louis. And James J. Hill and associates likewise had become enveloped in major strategic possibilities and held no further interest in Iowa ventures. Browne had to seek sugar daddies elsewhere. That would take time. Meanwhile,Illinois Central drilled a new important channel from its pioneer cross-state line at Tara, just west of Fort Dodge, southwestward through Rockwell City and beyond to Council Bluffs/Omaha; Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul reached up from Des Moines to Rockwell City where one sprig jutted off to Storm Lake and another shoot proceeded northwest to Spencer and connection there to Spirit Lake; and, Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific, by way of surrogate Gowrie & Northwestern, preempted Marshalltown & Dakota by throwing down a line from Gowrie to Sibley—exactly the alignment Browne had announced for M&D through its charter in 1895. [10]

Successive corporate changes followed. Marshalltown & Dakota was succeeded by Boone, Rockwell City & Northwestern in 1901, but this was merely a cosmetic name change with all rights moving forward. A year later was born Newton & Northwestern Railroad Company (N&NW or the Newton) which acquired all previous privileges and assets, gathered up eastern investment capital, and with Browne as its chief executive announced plans



Above: In Newton & Northwestern Hamilton Browne proposed and then created a most improbable route structure.



Above: The "high bridge" between Fraser and Boone consumed a reported one million board feet of lumber and stood 155 feet above the surface of the earth.

to build and equip a road from Newton northwestward through Boone and Fraser to existing trackage up to Gowrie and then to Rockwell City, aggregating 102.5 miles. Newton to Rockwell City. Caustic observers must have wondered as to this most improbable route—starting at no place in particular, surely they muttered, and ending at no place in particular. What was Browne's motivation? Perhaps, more than a few observers speculated, the road would be completed as a nuisance or one quickly peddled off to one of the big roads. Rock Island, with its main Chicago-Council Bluffs thoroughfare at Newton and then in control of Des Moines & Fort Dodge at Gowrie might be a potential buyer but the new Reid-Moore syndicate at Rock Island had much bigger fish to fry. Iowa Central, with still another of its limbs touching Newton from the east was clearly the most logical candidate since acquisition of Newton & Northwestern certainly would extend its reach into the central portion of the state, but it too, was distracted, at the time becoming increasingly welded to M&StL. [11]

"After many disappointments I think I have arranged for funds to complete my Railroad project," Browne told James J. Hill on July 12, 1902, in a missive written on stationery from Rhoades & Richmond (bankers and brokers, 20 Broad Street, New York) "from Rockwell City to Newton...The parties with whom I have been dealing have been to Iowa and thoroughly examined the coal properties...the present line of Railroad, and the proposed extensions..." Browne then added a teaser: "I have thought it might also be desirable to extend the line further southeast from Newton, a distance of 37 miles, to Oskaloosa, where I would connect with CB&Q." (Hill and assorted powers including banker J. P. Morgan in 1901 had captured control of blue chip Chicago, Burlington & Quincy.) [12]

Construction on Newton & Northwestern began in 1902. It was heavy going trying to lift a line out of the Des Moines River Valley from Fraser to Boone. Crews had to work their way up a frowning escarpment that required heavy excavation through steep hills, throwing up numerous trestles, and erecting one particularly "high bridge" that would rise to a height of 155 feet with a span of 784 feet with 50 bents and consume a reported one million board feet of lumber. The bridge contractor accurately predicted that this one project alone would require a full year to complete. Elsewhere, graders and trackmen pushed out from Gowrie, reaching Rockwell City late in 1903. The tracklaying machine thumped into Boone on January 3, 1904; two months later a construction train delivered a turn table to Newton, but the crude track structure put down by Foley Brothers of St. Paul and the Baker Company of Minneapolis (to reflect, no doubt, James J. Hill's continuing influence on Browne) still required ballasting and surfacing. A completed road would not open until May 15. [13]

Meanwhile there were bills to be paid and, in fits and starts, a railroad to run. Capitalization predictably escalated well beyond that of all predecessor companies—200,000 common shares plus 5,000 preferred now authorized and held mostly by non-Iowans,

NEWTON & NORTHWESTERN RAILROAD COMPANY.

TIME TABLE NO. 3.

For the Exclusive Guidance of Employes; Not for the Information of the Public. The Company Reserves the Right to Vary from It at Pleasure.

TAKING EFFECT 12:01 P. M. DECEMBER 25TH, 1904.

TRAINS WEST BOUND.						STATIONS.	TRAINS EAST BOUND.			
2ND CLASS				1ST CLASS	Miles from Newton.		1ST CLASS	2ND CLASS		
	No. 7 Miners' Special	No. 5 Accommodation	No. 3 Accommodation	No. 1 Passenger			No. 2 Passenger	No. 4 Accommodation	No. 6 Accommodation	No. 8 Miners' Special
	Daily Except Sunday	Dy. Ex. Sun.	Dy. Ex. Sun.	Daily Except Sunday			Daily Except Sunday	Dy. Ex. Sun.	Dy. Ex. Sun.	Daily Except Sunday
				A. M.			P. M.	A. M.		
			Lv 12.50	Lv 7.32	0	Newton - w o	Ar. 6.10	Ar. 11.50		
			1.20	7.45	5 8	5.8 Metz - w	5.55	11.30		
			1.40	F 7.58	10 4	4.6 Goddard	F 5.40	11.05		
			2.15	MEET NO. 10 **8.10**	16 2	5.8 Mingo - x	5.29	10.45		
			2.40	F 8.22	21 4	5.2 Farrar	F 5.15	10.05		
			3.00	8.34	25 5	4.1 Loring - w	5.02	9 45		
			3.50	MEET NO. 4 **8.50**	32	6.5 Cambridge - x	4.45	MEET NO. 1 **9.20** / **8.50**		
			MEET NO. 2 **4.25**	9.08	40	8 Kelly - x	MEET NO. 2 **4.25**	8.25		
			4.40	9.18	43 2	3.2 Napier - w	4.15	7.45		
			5.07	F 9.30	48 5	5.3 Ericson	F 4.05	7.25		
	A. M.	A. M.				5.8			P. M.	P. M.
	Lv 6.30	Lv 6.00	Ar 5.30	9.43	54 3	Boone	3.50	Lv. 7.00 A. M.	Ar. 5.45	Ar 5.00
	Ar 7.00 A. M.	Ar 6.30 / Lv 7.15	P. M.	10.00	62 3	8 Fraser - w o	3.30		5.15 / 4.45	Lv 4.30 P. M.
		8.00		10.15	66 3	4 Fraser Junction	3.12		4.20	
		8.45		10.28	71 2	4 9 Boxholm	3.00		4.00	
		9.15		10.42	76 9	5.7 Lanyon	2.45		3.30	
		9.40 / 10.30		10.55	83 4	6 5 Gowrie - w o x	Lv. 2.30 / Ar. 2.22		Lv. 3.05 / Ar. 2.05	
		10.50		F 11.09	89 4	6 Easley	F 2.05		1.45	
		11.10 / 11.30		11.20	94 1	4.7 Rinard - x	1.50		1.20	
		11.45		F 11.30	98 1	4 Piper	F 1.35		1.00	
		Ar 12.00 A. M.		Ar. 11.40 P. M.	102 3	4 2 Rockwell City - wxo	Lv. 1.25 P. M.		Lv. 12 45 P. M.	

SPECIAL RULES.

1 East bound trains have the absolute right of track over trains of the same and inferior class running in the opposite direction.

2 Trains of all classes, except regular passenger trains, must approach all stations under full control, so that it shall not be possible for them to strike any train that may be inside yard limits. The entire responsibility in such cases rests with the approaching train. When at stations trains carrying passengers must be protected against approaching trains at all times and under all circumstances, even if they are inside of yard limits. It will be understood that yard limits extend to the outside switches, unless otherwise designated by yard limit signs or special rules.

C. L. SIVERLY, Train Dispatcher.

3 Trains will not exceed a speed of 5 miles per hour over high bridge between Fraser and Boone.

4 Coal Chutes: Fraser.

5 Water Stations. Metz, Loring, Napier, Boone, Fraser, Gowrie, Rockwell City.

6 Turn Tables or Wyes: Newton, Boone, Fraser, Gowrie, Rockwell City.

7 Registering Stations: Newton, Boone, Rockwell City.

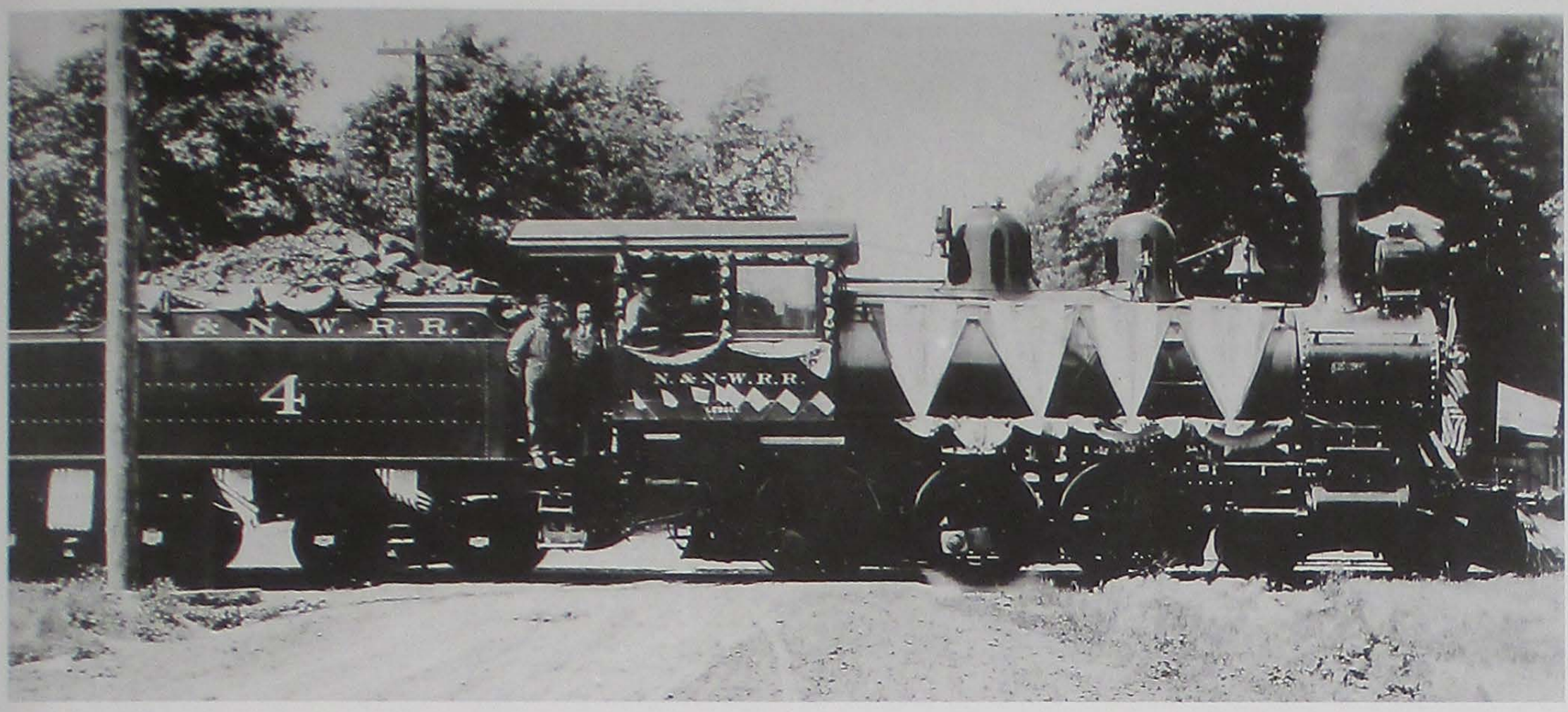
8 Interlocking Plants: Mingo, Cambridge, Kelley, Gowrie, Rinard, Rockwell City.

9 Standard rules govern.

J. L. BLAKE, General Manager.

Above: The Newton offered service typical of the era, but the "Miners' Special" offered an unusual but important twist.

although working cash in support of construction ($23,958 per mile) came mostly from sales of bonds. The company had acquired 15 gondola cars in 1900 for carriage of coal, added more later, and picked up three additional locomotives in 1904. Beginning early in 1902 N&W operated a daily-except-Sunday mixed train on the Fraser-Gowrie leg. Effective May 15, 1904, that job made a Gowrie turn and went through Boone to Cambridge and back to Fraser. Two additional turns worked between Fraser and Boone. By Christmas 1904 N&NW dispatched a daylight round trip passenger train (two cars) to serve the entire line, "accommodation" (mixed) trains Newton-Boone and Boone-Rockwell City, and a "miners' special" Boone-Fraser (all daily-except-Sunday). One coal chute served all locomotives at Fraser, water was available at Newton, Rockwell City and five



Above: Newton & Northwestern's locomotive number 4, all dolled up on this day, was called to perform passenger and freight duties alike.

other locations, wyes or turntables were provided at Newton, Boone, Fraser, Gowrie, and Rockwell City. The operating ratio (ratio of operating expenses to operating revenue, a common efficiency measurement among railroads) leapt from an amazing 38.23 in 1902 to a troubling 81.41 in 1906. [14]

"The relentless march of the screaming locomotive opening up a vast extended country" was the enthusiastic mantra over much of the United States from before the Civil War into the following century. Did the same impact obtain with the coming of Newton & Northwestern to its service territory? No. Population growth, clearly identifiable earlier as steamcars opened huge swaths of the country, did not follow N&NW rails across the company's six-county service area. Indeed the entire expanse already was gridironed with rail lines that earlier had spawned a significant number of by now well established communities and gave rise to innumerable farmsteads that were liberally sprinkled about. N&NW passed through some of these communities—Mingo, Cambridge, and Gowrie as examples—but while it propagated a few new townsites—Loring, Napier, and Lanyon as examples—none except Boxholm ever would amount to much. Most were like Goddard where farm people for miles around traded and claimed it as their own. But Goddard would not be so much a town as a community. [15]

Coal—the mining of it and the transportation of it—always loomed large in Hamilton Browne's thinking. This was reflected with a 4.1-mile N&NW branch thrown down from Goddard to Colfax for the purpose of getting near mines in that area; service began on December 29, 1905. But none of the mines served by the company or within reach of the road were inexhaustible and surely Browne must have pinned hopes for N&NW's long term viability on other sources of revenue—especially on "new agriculture" which was understood to mean "that agriculture had passed from pioneer existence to modern economy and living." Said one overexhuberant observer in 1899: "From the beginning of Indiana to the end of Nebraska there is nothing but corn, cattle, and contentment." Said another: "The state of Iowa has grown from a wilderness to a great agricultural...commonwealth in the allotted life of man." Newton & Northwestern certainly tapped lands "ready to break into fertility at the slightest provocation of the plow" as one hearty advocate put it, but much of the best prospective area—Webster and Calhoun counties—had yet to be properly drained by ditches and tile. The future for heavy tonnage from agricultural production clearly looked good, but what of the present for Hamilton Browne and for Newton & Northwestern with its acutely improbable route structure? [16]

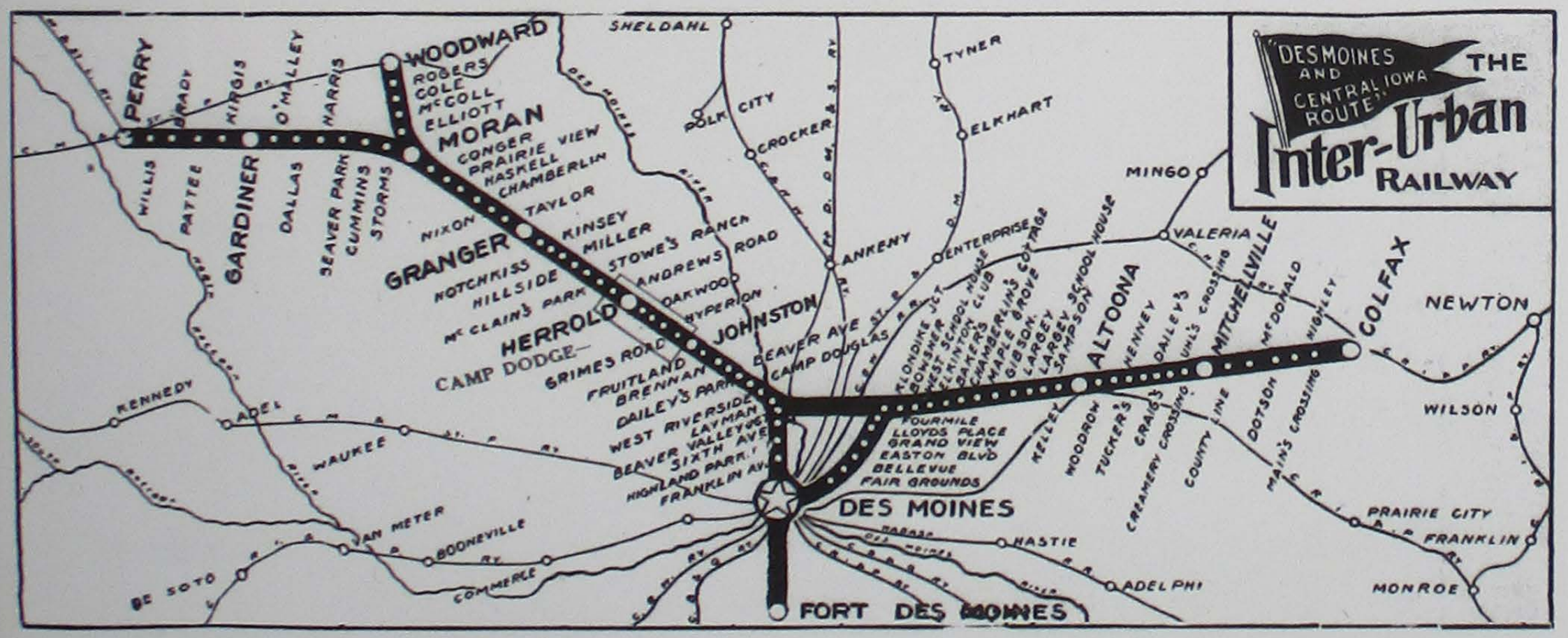
3

A Grand Chimera

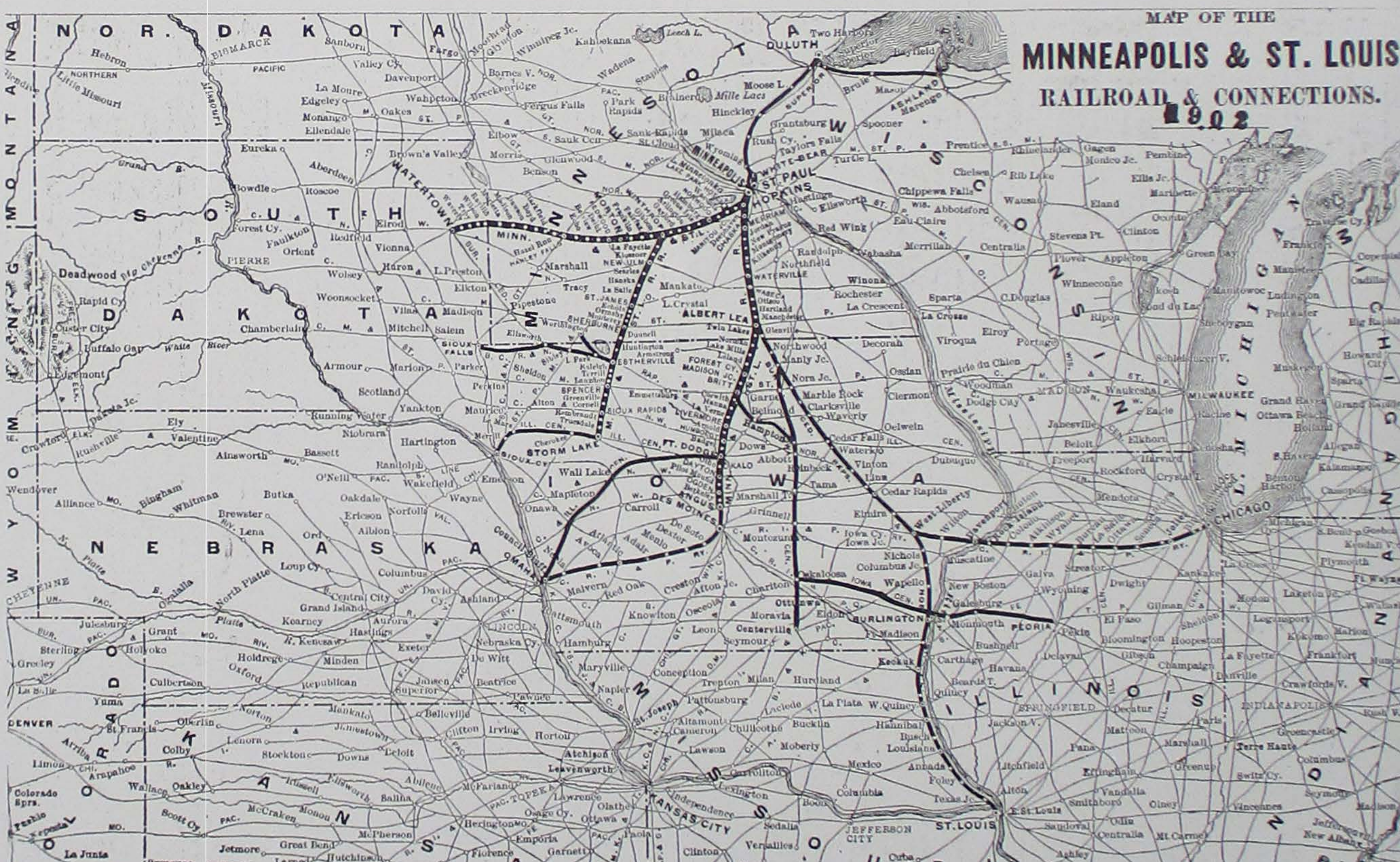
The Newton & Northwestern scheme was from the outset a grand chimera, a fabrication, an unrealizable dream. The road's curiously configured route structure threaded through a part of Iowa saturated with earlier established rail service; prospects for current freight and passenger traffic were thin in the extreme; and, the company's capitalization was monstrous. "The Newton" was a house of cards. Disaster was not long in arriving. In fiscal 1905 N&NW generated receipts of $112,924 with expenses of $103,392—a net profit from operations of $9,582, far from the $150, 286 necessary to service debt. [1]

Hamilton Browne's search for capital investment had taken him first to New York where he found no bidders and then to Boston where Old Colony Trust picked up $2.460 million of Newton's debt. When the company could not pay interest due on that debt Old Colony predictably took a dim view. Browne and crew were swept out of management positions and all of them except for Browne likewise forfeited their seats on the board of directors. In was 30-year-old Homer Loring as president and two other Bostonians as vice president and secretary/treasurer—each one also appointed to the board as was Henry W. Poor, a well-known private banker who, with his father Henry V. Poor, had established the authoritative *Poor's Manual of Railroads.* [2]

What to do with this problem-plagued property? Loring went west to make an on-site inspection and to ponder options. On a short term basis, authority was given to push the 4.1-mile spur down from Goddard to Colfax, making a head-to-head connection there with Inter-Urban Railway, which had tapped into the Colfax



Above: The service was new and the electric cars were still a novelty for many when car 80 loaded passengers in Ames, circa 1908. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

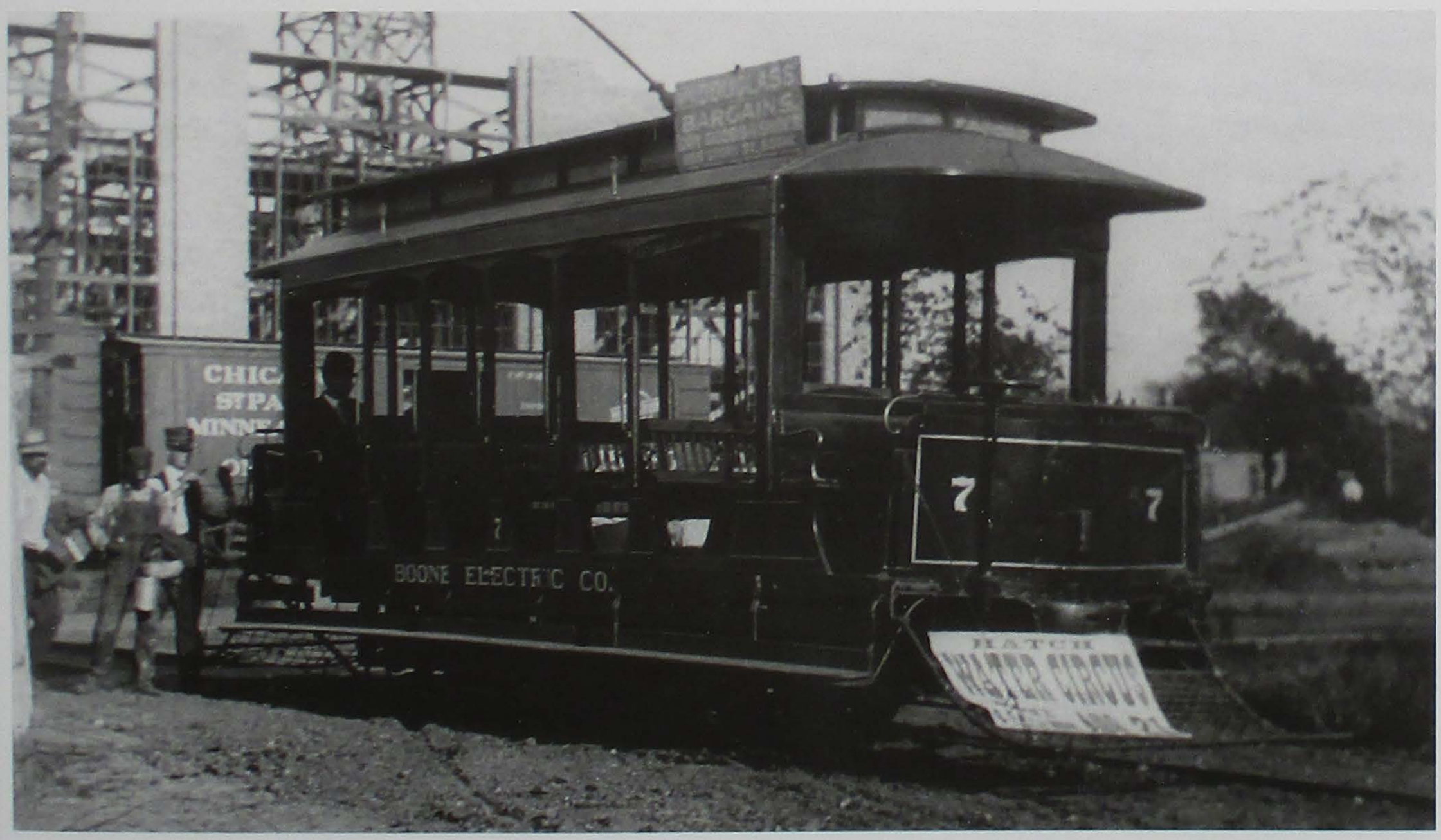


Above: Minneapolis & St. Louis already had a line well in place between Fort Dodge and Des Moines. Could the area support two routes?

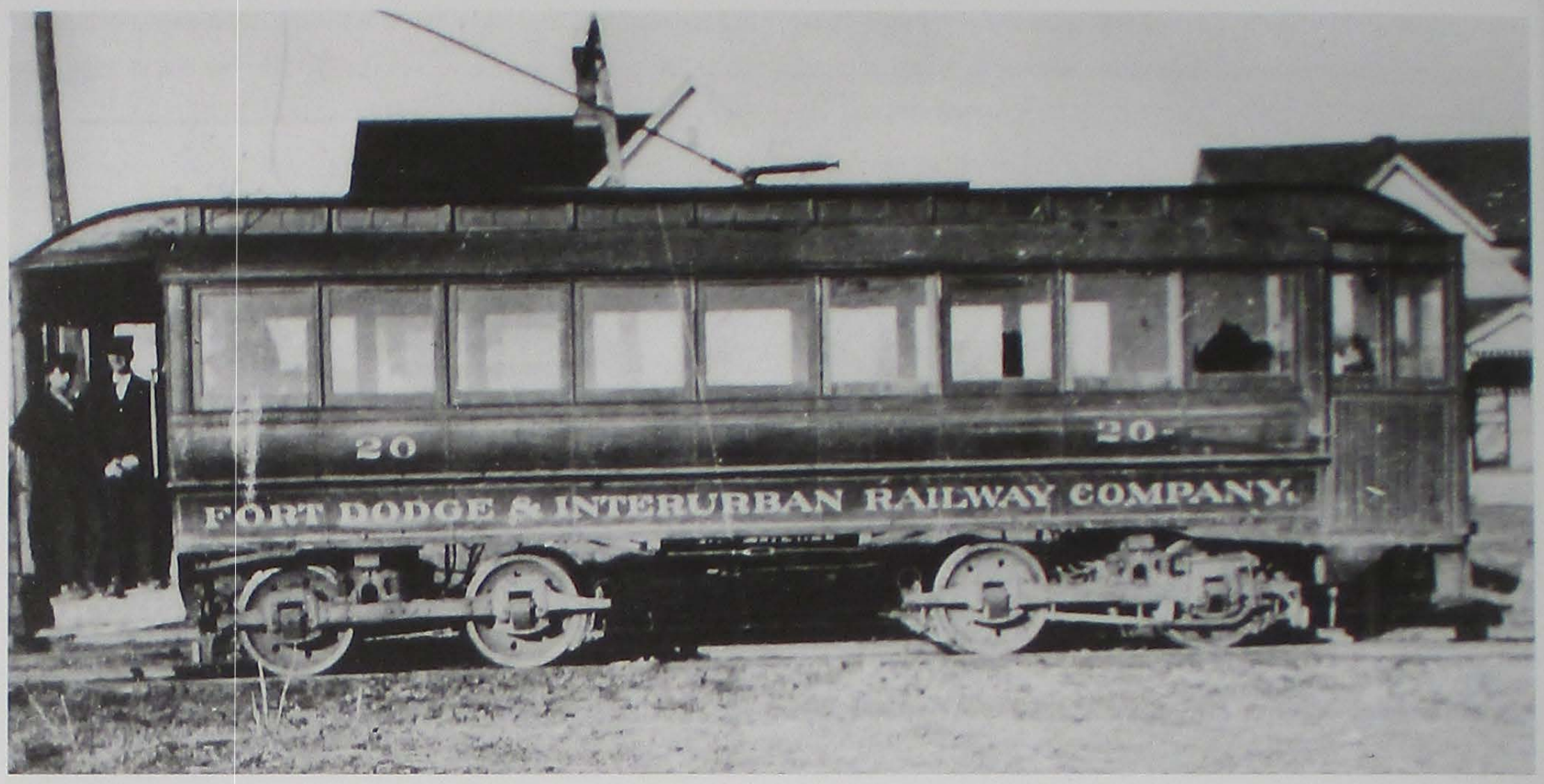
area early in 1903 and served area coal mines which billed some of their production to interchange with Newton & Northwestern. As it happened, Inter-Urban was electrically powered. Loring was intrigued. He already was familiar with electrified rail operation in the Northeast and he was fully aware of "interurban fever" then sweeping much of the country. [3]

The evolution of electrically powered trains was amazingly swift once initiated. An elevated rail system had been built in New York as early as 1867, but subways such as that begun at Boston in 1897 had awaited advances in electrical engineering. Those advances would have important application for street railways and would give birth to a new phenomenon—electrically powered intercity railroads or "interurbans." Beginning in 1889 with a seven-mile rural trolley line in Ohio, interurban mileage grew to nationwide total of over 1,500 a decade later. In 1916, the peak year, 15,580 miles of interurban railroad would be in service across the country. [4]

Tiny Tama & Toledo actually initiated Iowa's interurban era in 1894, but others quickly appeared around the state. In 1897, Mason City & Clear Lake Traction Company completed a route from Iowa Central's depot in Mason City to the White Pier Dance Hall and Oaks Hotel in Clear Lake. The road handled an abundance of tourists in season and a heavy volume of freight from Mason City Brick & Tile among other important customers. Inter-Urban, later known as Des Moines & Central Iowa, began life in 1898 and by 1903 had the line eastward from Des Moines to Colfax, and in 1905-1906 pressed northwestward through Granger and Woodward to Perry. Cars intermingled with those of the Des Moines street railway: "All streetcars including interurban cars to and from Altoona, Mitchellville, and Colfax stop at Union Station." Cedar Rapids & Iowa City (Crandic) completed its 27-mile thoroughfare linking those cities in 1904 and immediately scheduled 13 round trips daily; Crandic would add a branch from Cedar Rapids to Mount Vernon in 1914. At the state's eastern extremity, Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine linked Clinton and Davenport in 1904, and would do the same from Davenport to Muscatine in 1912. In northern Iowa, Charles City Western would build from Charles City to Marble Rock in 1911 and from Charles City to Colwell in 1915. [5]



Above: Boone Electric sported service within the city of Boone and out to C&NW's "high bridge." *Edward H. Meyers/Norman Carlson Colletion*



Above: Fort Dodge & Interurban Railway was organized in 1902 as a traction operation extension of Fort Doget Light & Power Company. Number 20 was the second car purchased. *George Niles collection.*

Many interurban companies emerged from a steam tradition or at one point employed both steam and electric power. Centerville, Moravia & Albia, dating from 1879, was one of these. It evolved into Albia & Centerville, then Centerville, Albia & Southern, would be electrified in 1914, although freight duties to be handled by steam until May 1915. Elsewhere, Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern evolved from Waterloo & Cedar Falls Rapid Transit which spiked down a line from Waterloo to Cedar Falls in 1897, Waterloo to Waverly in 1902, and would drop a line down from Waterloo to Cedar Rapids in 1914. It, too, used steam until fully electrified. [6]

What, then, of Newton & Northwestern in all of this? Sinking more capital into the entire 102-mile line clearly was out of the question. Indeed, was there any long term potential for the road or even parts of it? Loring explored choices and analyzed prospects for the entirety of central Iowa. Options were few. There was no gainsaying the nagging reality that every part of the region was gridironed with an impressive rail network. Yet Loring ultimately concluded that there might be a niche market if he could cobble together a vertical axis route linking the capital city of Des Moines with the growing city of Fort Dodge—doing this by utilizing a portion of the Newton as a center pivot. To do so would require, admittedly, considerable new construction, there would be issues gaining entrance into both terminal cities, and Minneapolis & St. Louis already owned a well-placed artery linking the two places. But Loring perceived that he might reach attractive sources of freight traffic if he could wedge a way into the gypsum mills and clay works just east of Fort Dodge. Furthermore, much of the land through which new lines would pass offered eventual significant tonnage in agricultural produce. And if electrified as an "interurban," frequent and speedy service was certain to draw substantial passenger business. Daunting, all of it, indeed. But Loring plunged ahead by seeing to formation of Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railroad (FtDDM&S, Fort Dodge Line, or FDL) on February 16, 1906, and then dispatched locating engineers to find viable routes north and south from Newton & Northwestern. [7]

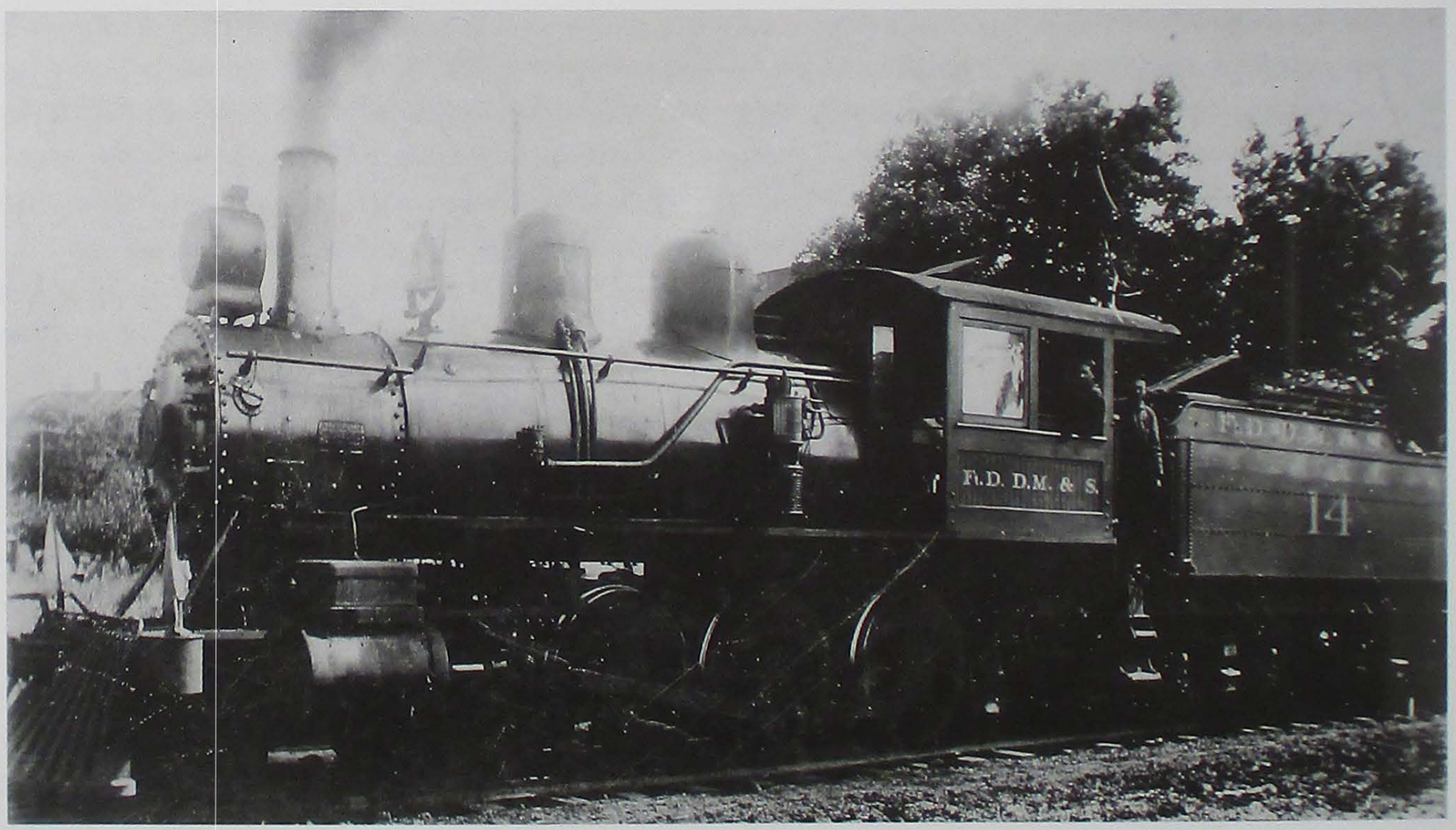
Street railways had popped up in Iowa at Albia, Bettendorf, Burlington, Cedar Falls, Clear Lake, Clinton, Davenport, Dubuque, Fort Madison, Iowa City, Keokuk, Mason City, Oskaloosa, Red Oak, and Waterloo among other places. Horses and mules initially were employed by the Marshalltown Street Railway which offered service from the city's Union Station to uptown

Above: Local men at Fort Dodge perceived the need to link depots of the steam railroads serving that community with the downtown business district by way of an efficient streetcar system. Homer Loring found the Fort Dodge streetcar operation to be the imperative entrance to the capital of Webster County.

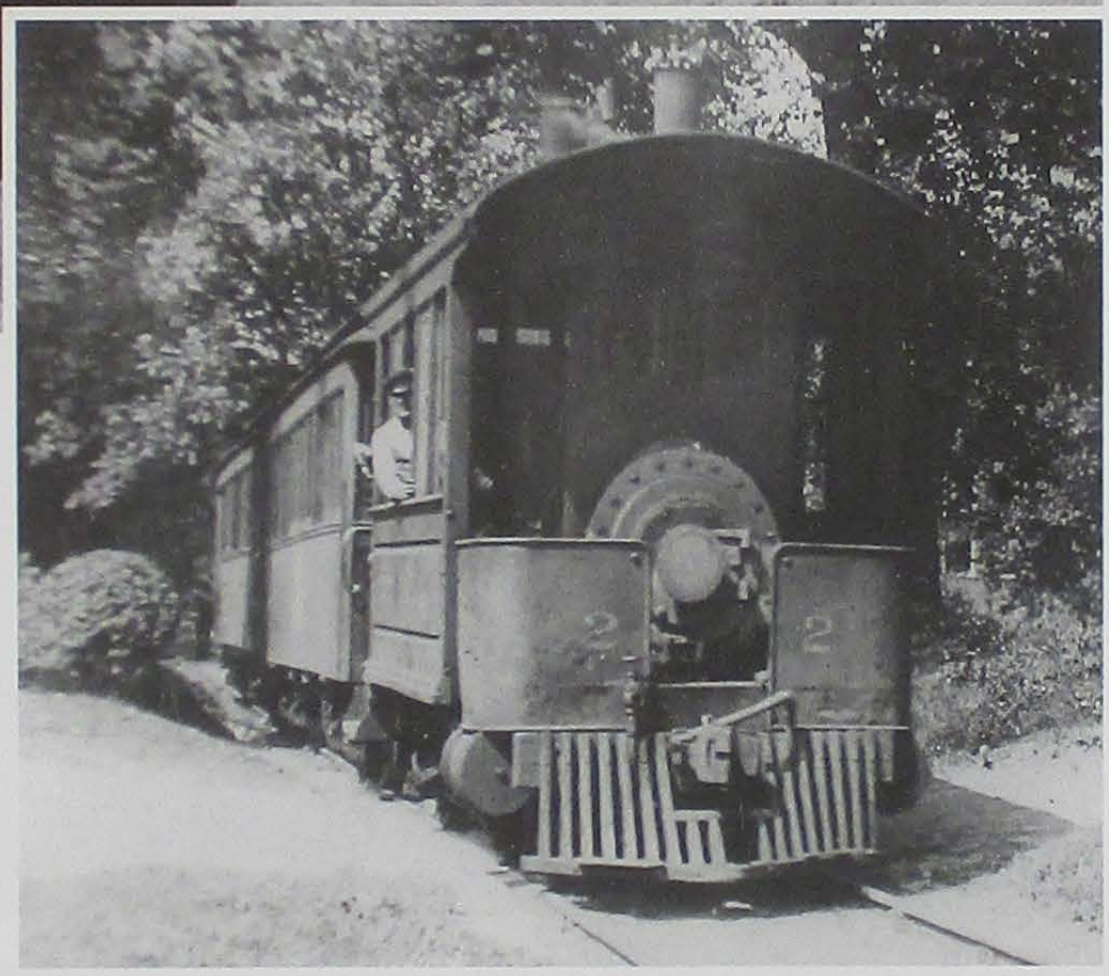
and to the fairgrounds, was taken over by Marshalltown Light & Power and electrified, and its route expanded to the Iowa Soldiers Home and the cemetery. The Council Bluffs & Omaha Street Railway began operation in 1870 with mule-power, but switched to steam and eventually expanded as a massive electrified system servicing Council Bluffs and Omaha. Up the Missouri River at Sioux City, energetic civic leaders bridled at that city's few and scattered surface lines powered by horses or cables, and in 1887 formed and built the Sioux City Elevated Railroad from Third and Jones streets in the business district past the stockyards and packing houses, continuing with a standard surface line to the east end of Morningside Avenue. The Elevated was Sioux City's tangible statement of power and prosperity. Des Moines had initiated horsecar operation as early as 1868; the system quickly expanded to serve Urbandale and Valley Junction (West Des Moines). "Hurry!," pleaded Boone Electric Street Railway & Light Company: "Take the cars for the famous C&NW Ry. HIGH BRIDGE" (completed west of Boone in 1900). "Cars leave every fifteen minutes." At Independence electric cars whisked eager horsemen from the Illinois Central depot, passing by the Gedney Hotel to Rush Park for trotting-horse races. Tama & Toledo in its first incarnation ran between the Chicago & North Western and Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul depots at Tama and the court house square in Toledo. [8]

Fort Dodge, too, had a modest street railway system which derived from the entrepreneurial instincts of local men who took over a gas company and then started an electrical generating plant to light the streets, business houses, and homes of the city as well as to power streetcars. Rail was put down in 1896 and operations began during the next summer in a way that linked Illinois Central and Minneapolis & St. Louis depots located in the city's Des Moines River Valley with the business district around the City Square and along Central Avenue to the carbarn on Twelfth Street. In 1901 the line was extended east and southeast toward what became Oleson Park and the gypsum mills where many of the city's working men were employed and the carbarn was relocated to end-of-tracks. Twenty-minute service was the rule over the

Central Ave., Fort Dodge, Iowa.



Above: Steam had been summoned to shove the first interurban car up to lines of the Fort Dodge Street Railway and steam would hang around portions of the property for some time.

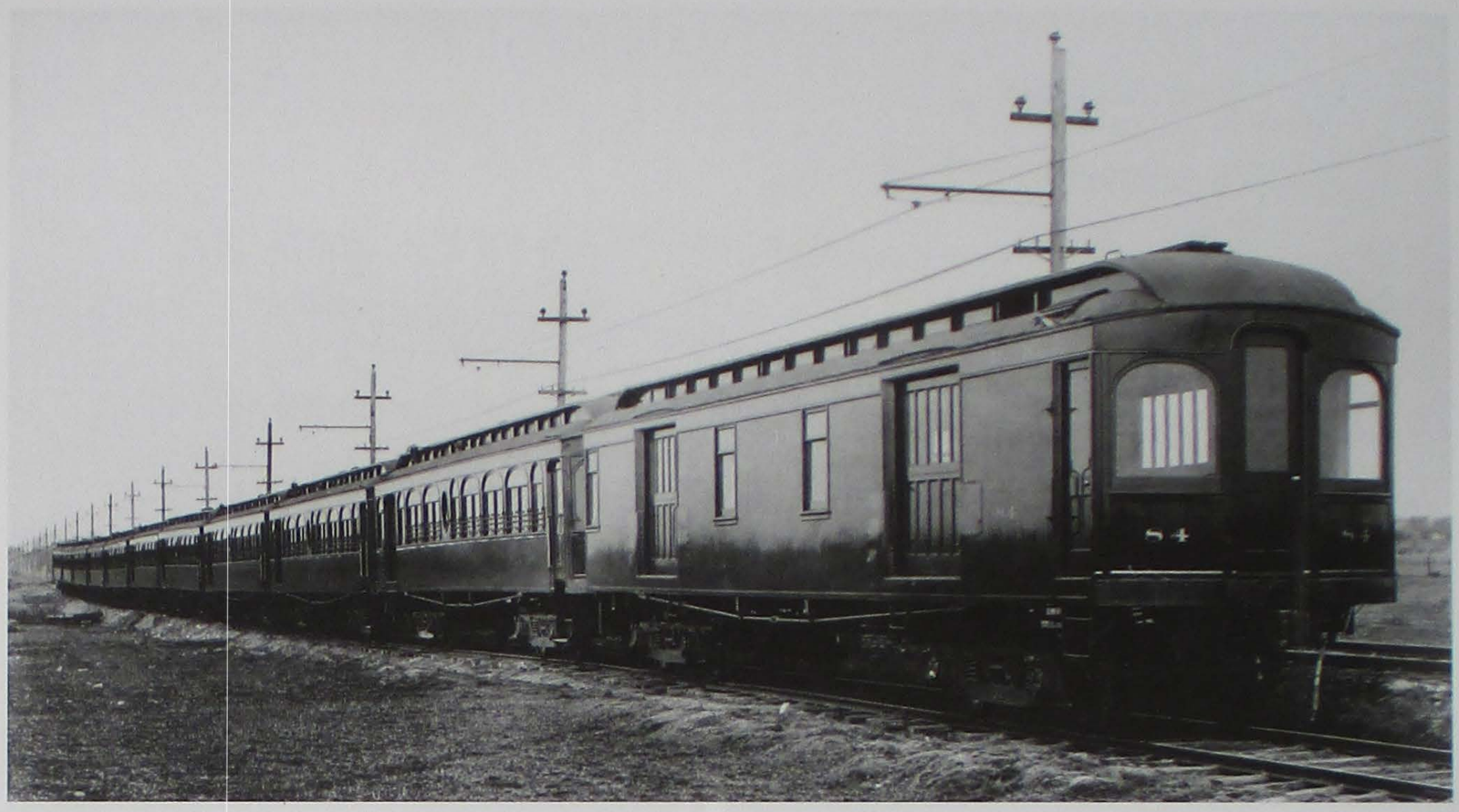


Above & Right: Two views. Ames & College provided access to Ames and to the nearby Agricultural College for recently birthed FtDDM&S.

two-and-one-half-mile route using three cars with "Fort Dodge Light & Power" stenciled on their letterboards. In addition to the routine heavy daily volume the cars likewise were crammed with large crowds heading to or coming home from frequent dances at Olsen Park or in summer to attend popular Chautauqus. [9]

It was the extended streetcar operation connecting downtown Fort Dodge to the city's southeast side that Homer Loring found irresistible. Thus came new ownership. In the spring of 1906 Fort Dodge Light & Power Company—its power, heat, and light plants and its streetcar operations passed to nascent Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern and then restyled Fort Dodge Street Railway. In this way, the "interurban," when completed, could run its cars into town and right down Central Avenue to the City Square (a wye to be installed for the purpose of turning the cars). [10]

Loring dispatched Walter Chamberlain to be his eyes and ears in Iowa. Born, raised, and educated in England, Chamberlain began his career in 1884 as a station clerk on the Chicago & Alton and thereafter built an impressive business biography with various other carriers before landing at Newton & Northwestern as auditor in 1904. He would be a busy fellow. Early in April 1906 grading contracts were let from north of Des Moines to Kelley and also from Kelley to Ames. Here was a new wrinkle. In fact, on May 1 Loring had Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern acquire tiny Ames &

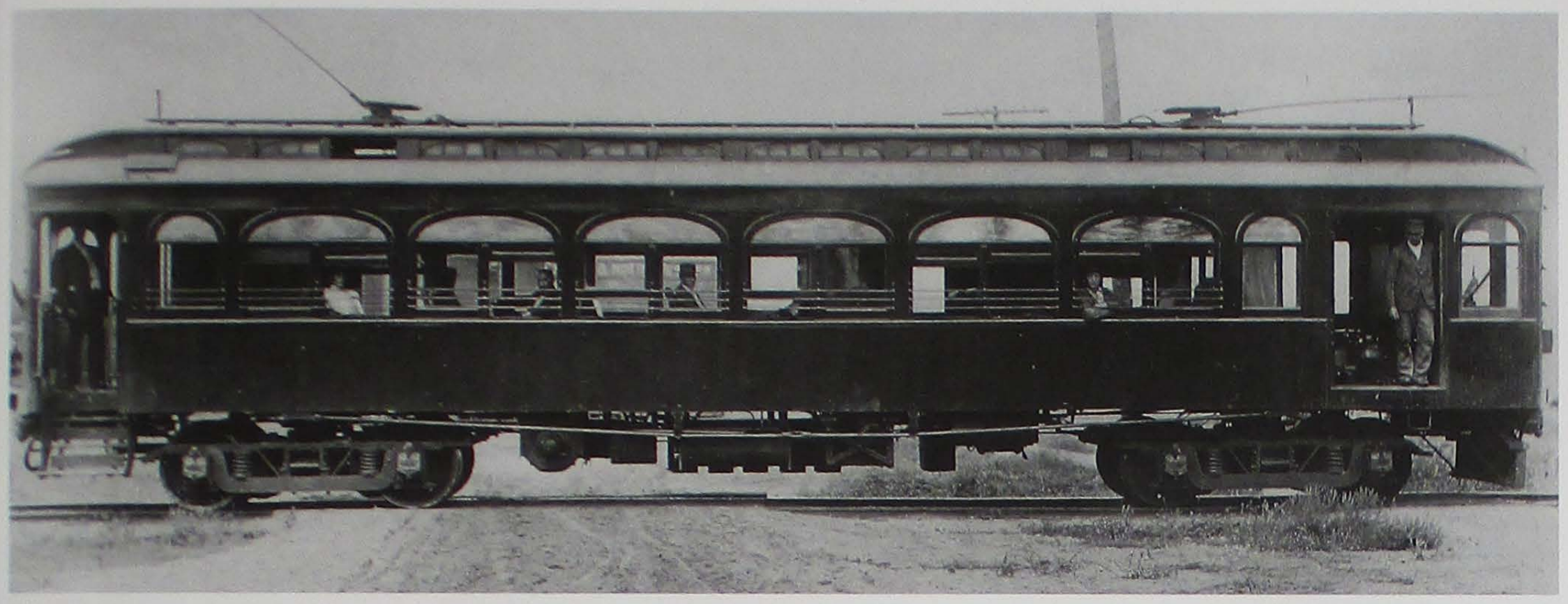


Above: Fort Dodge Line's passenger equipment was ordered to steam railroad standards. Cars were delivered without electrical equipment which was installed at the Boone shops.

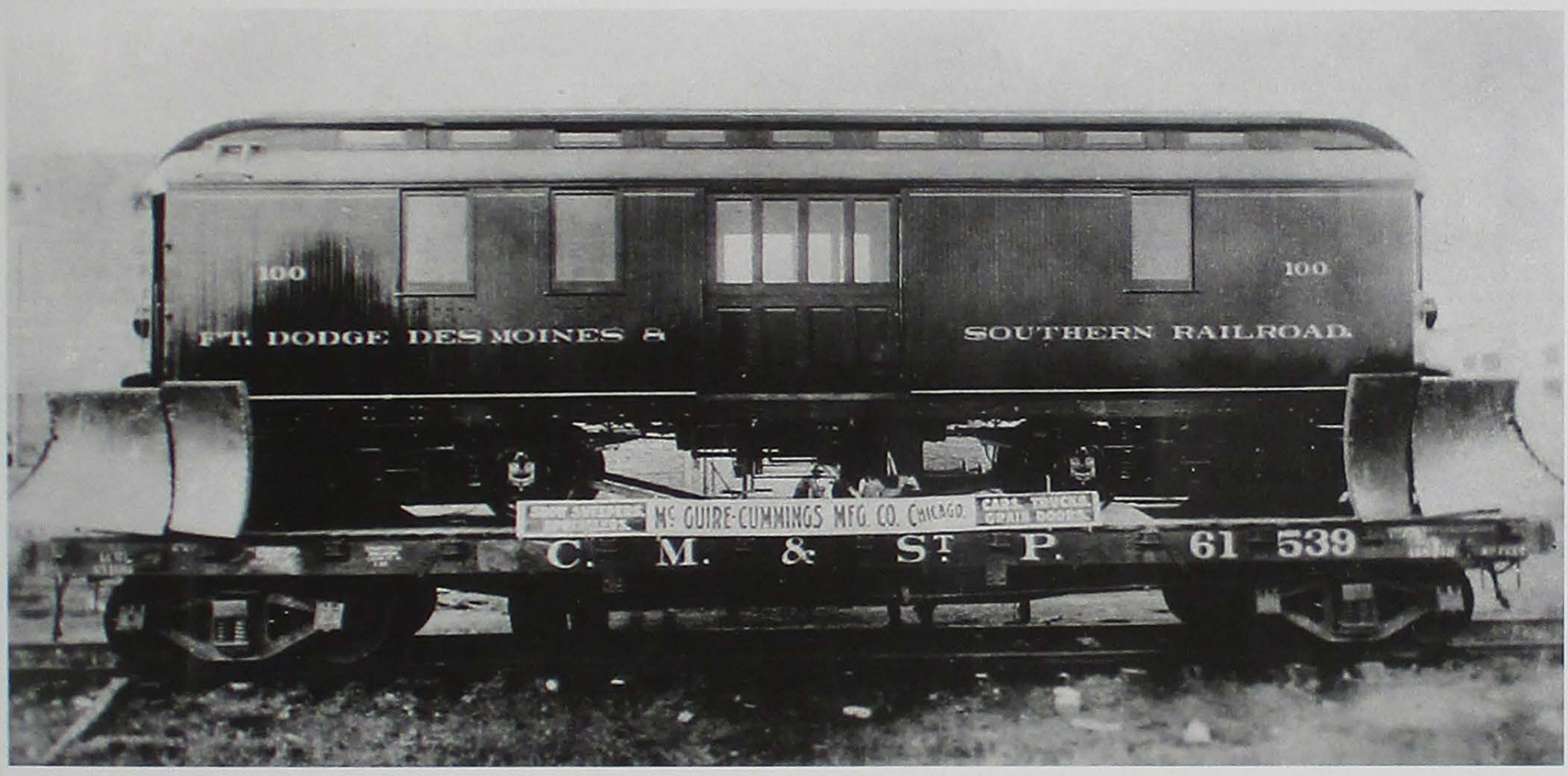
College Railway, a 1.98-mile plug that ran from downtown Ames westward to the nearby Agricultural College (present day Iowa State University). Organized in 1890, placed in operation on July 4, 1891, Ames & College—"The Dinkey" locals called it—earned its very modest way by toting passengers and freight "on irregular schedule" aboard flimsy cars and powered by two leaky "donkey" (steam dummy) locomotives. In fiscal 1900, Ames & College had gross revenue of $5,561 against operating expenses of $3,433 or net of $2,130 before debt service. Its barebone plant would need considerable upgrading and, of course, pole line and wire installed before FtDDM&S could initiate service on June 29, 1907. Indeed, steam-powered Dinkeys would hang on until ended on September 6, 1907. [11]

The *Fort Dodge Messenger* paid close attention to the railroad industry—its "Track & Train" column was a regular feature—and its editor on April 6, 1906, predictably celebrated near completion of Chicago Great Western's new station located at the head of the city's Central Avenue. It was "beautiful" he said. "Fort Dodge has developed into a great trading center," he argued, largely due to "train service" provided by Illinois Central, Minneapolis & St. Louis, and Chicago Great Western—each of which brought eager customers on a routine basis from nearby towns. Small wonder, then, that the *Messenger* followed the evolution of the new "interurban" road with particular interest. M&StL, noted the editor, was visibly nervous over prospects of competition in the Des Moines-Fort Dodge corridor and reportedly was considering purchase of "gasoline motorcars" on its line up through Pilot Mound, Dayton, and Burnside which could "give a better and more frequent service than could their electric competition." In any event, the interurban was certain to benefit Fort Dodge and its merchants. [12]

The full route structure for FtDDM&S gradually took form. New construction from the existing N&NW line three miles southeast of Kelley (Des Moines Junction, later Midvale) to above Des Moines (roughly twenty-five miles) and connection there with Inter-Urban was one major chunk. In the short term FDL freight trains would work into and out of I-U's Flint Brick Yard, I-U would break up and make up FDL trains, and I-U would handle FDL merchandise cars to and from its freight house at Second and Grand. Passenger cars likewise would use I-U to



Above: Profile of an unidentified Fort Dodge Line car shows the classic lines of a Niles-built car. The wear of several years of service is evident in the barely visible road name on the letterboard. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*



Above: Express motor 100 has just been loaded on a flatcar at the McGuire-Cummings plant and is ready for transport for duty on the Fort Dodge Line. *Bushnell-Krisak Archive*

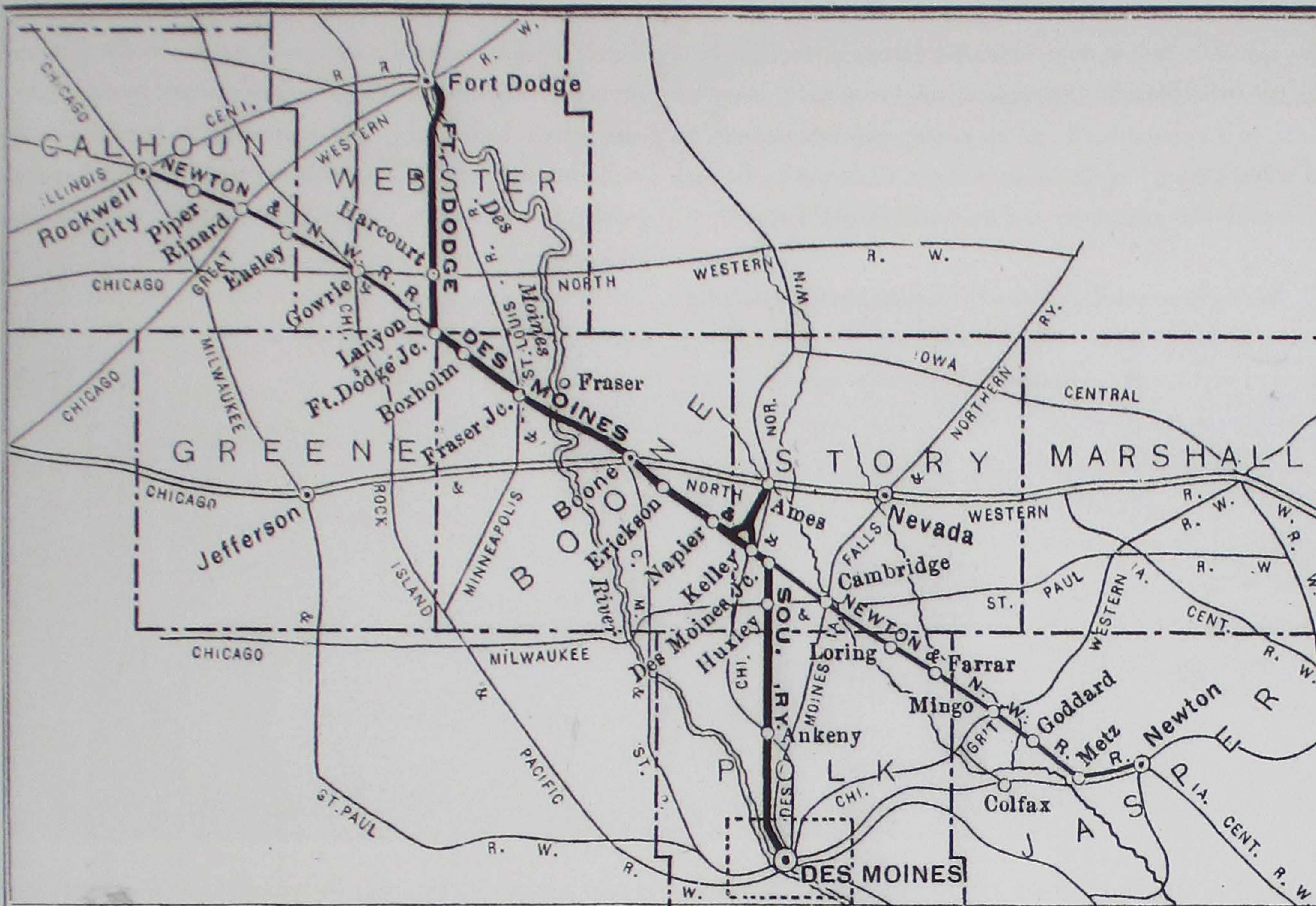
access the latter's facility in downtown Des Moines on Mulberry. Consideration on the north end was given to a possible alignment reaching up from west of Fraser to Lehigh and then northwest to Fort Dodge, but that prospect was discarded in favor of a shot from Fort Dodge Junction (later Hope), 4.2 miles above Boxhoim, for 21 miles to meet the Fort Dodge Street Railway in East Fort Dodge (attendant branches out to reach gypsum mills). Murray Brothers of Cedar Rapids gathered in the grading contract for the top end while J. G. White & Company of New York City gained the right to provide the entire package of electrification—placing overhead feed and high tension wire, trolleys, poles and crossarms, bonding the rails and equipping a central power house at Fraser, and putting up substations along the way. Work on the grade near Harcourt was being hurried reported the *Messenger* on June 23, 1906, the newspaper's real estate transfer column was thick with right-of-way deeds; by fall plans for bridge work south

Above: Jewett-built double-truck city car 288 at Main and Kellog in downtown Ames. Buses were to replace streetcars in 1929. *Ames Historical Society*

of Fort Dodge were authorized, and at Boone residents voted to give FtDDM&S a franchise on use of streets for tracks, poles, wire, etc. At the end of 1906, however, the *Messenger* ruefully admitted "no interurban before July first" of the next year—work stopped on grading "because of cold weather." **13**

All of it, of course, had to be paid for-even before the first wheel was turned. At mid-summer in 1906 FtDDM&S issued debt in the amount of $2.15 million—twenty-five year bonds paying four-and-one-half per cent and all of which were acquired by the same Old Colony Trust of Boston which held Newton securities. In Fort Dodge, the *Messenger* interpreted this as a good omen. "The people back of the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern are the capitalists who propose to keep the railway," said the writer in reference to Homer Loring and associates. "They are not promoters looking for the purchaser's money before the property is constructed. They are representatives of New England financiers looking for unlimited investments of a thoroughly safe character." **14**

The freezing winter of 1906-1907 certainly did nothing to squelch the burning infection of the interurban craze as innumerable schemes full of optimism and ozone popped up around the country and close to home. One grandiose project offered a double track electric railroad in straight line fashion from New York to Chicago. Elsewhere visionaries later proposed the Minneapolis, Kansas City & Gulf Electric Railway, a double track thoroughfare from the North Star state to the Lone Star state which, had it come to fruition, would have passed through Dows, Des Moines, and Kellerton on a vertical route through Iowa. And dreamers and schemers also sought local aid for a "high speed passenger and freight" road from Waterloo to Perry through Eldora, Story City, and Boone, connecting, said its proponents, "with the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern...into the city of Des Moines." There was little merit to the idea and it perished accordingly. Also nearby, advocates urged an electric road from Sioux City through LeMars and Primgahr to Okoboji and Spirit Lake while still others forecast a line dropped "from some point on the Soo Line about 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis" and



Above: Home Loring's dream was to utilize a portion of Newton & Northwestern as a pivot, adding new lines to reach both Fort Dodge and Des Moines and to electrify all or most of it.

pointing directly south to Iowa, planning to connect with Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, "presumably at Fort Dodge" and in that way bringing "vast tonnage of lumber, wheat, and other exports" to the Hawkeye State. There seemed no end to such projects. The *Messenger* confidently predicted that FtDDM&S itself would press beyond the city to the northwest with an "extension of their trolley line" to Lake Okoboji. The logic was undeniable said the Fort Dodge newspaper, since "summer excursion business to the lakes" for the road "would develop an enormous volume of business, besides securing much patronage from other interurban feeders at Des Moines." Others seemed bent on forcing the hand of the still unbuilt Fort Dodge Line. To that end one group presented a fully pollinated Spirit Lake, Emmetsburg & Fort Dodge Railroad, put surveyors in the field, and solicited investors. It, too, properly became one of the manifold "paper railroads" of the time. 15

There seemed considerable public confusion as to the true transportation purposes of the Fort Dodge Line. The *Messenger* pointed out that the company's management planned to establish "stations every half mile on the line...located near farm houses so that a person desiring to stop near a farm may designate the place by the name of the farm." This implied a concentration on swift, frequent, and convenient passenger operation in typical interurban form as prime reason for the company's existence. Confirmation as to passenger primacy was further suggested when rolling stock of the company was simply defined in newspapers as that providing carriage of passengers. So, too, was the suggestion that FDL would offer connections with other railroads at multiple points up and down the Des Moines-Fort Dodge artery. True enough, all of it. But those cars ordered from Niles Car Company would be built to "the width of the railroad passenger coach which is not the

case with the ordinary electric interurban car." In other words, they would be built to steam railroad standards as would, in fact, the railroad in general. Connections, yes, but in most cases that meant track connections for the interchange of freight business. In sum, Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern would take on the dual personality of the interurban and a muscular freight hauler. [16]

Was a split personality prudent? "The strength of the interurban lies in the low cost per mile of the moving unit, thus allowing frequent service, and a low unit load as a paying proposition," wrote an analyst for *Railway Age*. "Further," he said, "the power house being of necessity operated as continuous service, additional service during periods which are not originally patronized by passengers is performed at minimum cost." As applied to FtDDM&S, that meant it could, when completed, conveniently offer a flurry of daylight passenger operation and run its freight trains at low cost and without much track competition in evening hours. [17]

What were the company's freight prospects? During the first decade of the twentieth century Iowa's steam railroads generated about one-third of local billings from agricultural products (corn, oats, wheat, barley, hay), and approximately twenty per cent each from soft coal and manufactured items. Lumber, livestock, packing house products, clay brick and tile, and less-than-carload odds and ends added to the mix. Fort Dodge Line figured to do well in most of these commodities, billed to or shipped from on-line customers. All looked in order. [18]

Above: Residents of many Midwestern towns felt that with the arrival of the interurban, their town was now "on the map." Early scene shows No. 78 in Ames as a sprinkler wagon works its way up the street on the left. The use of sprinkler wagons was one way to control dust in the days before paved streets. *Mrs. Ruth C. Jackson collection*

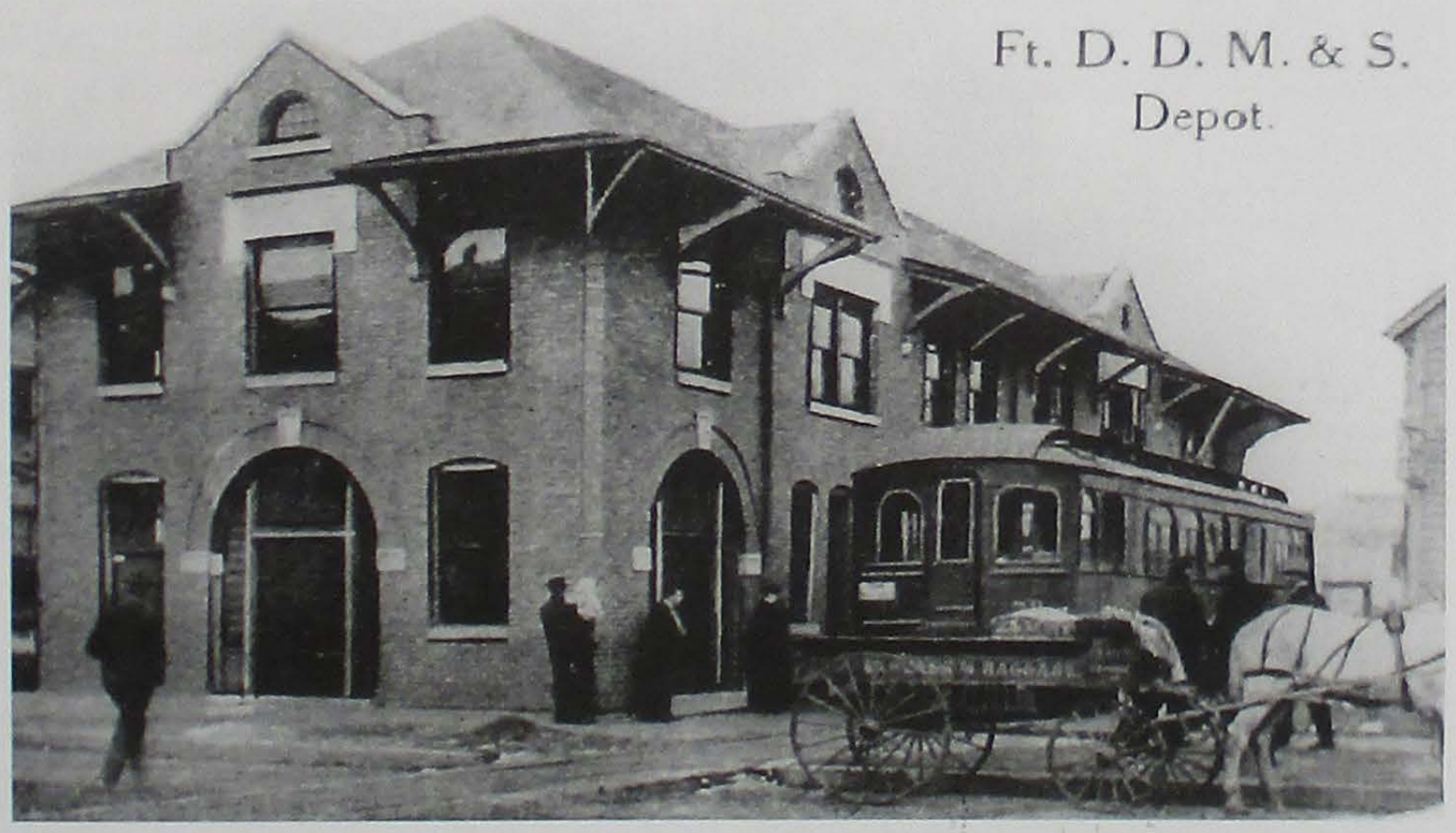
Above & Below: Spectacular bridges aside, much of FDL's route was over vast flat farmland. Both photos show the right-of-way west of Boone.
Top: *George Krambles*; Bottom: *William C, Janssen*; b*oth from Norman Carlson collection*

4

An Electric Steam Railway

Corporate, financial, and even operational relationships between Newton & Northwestern and Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern often were vague and confused and would remain so for some time. Old Colony Trust, and to a lesser extent, American Trust held mortgages on both properties, and Homer Loring and associates from Boston served as executive officers; Joseph L. Blake was on site and was general manager of each road. Early in January 1907, FtDDM&S secured trackage rights over roughly 40 miles of the Newton (Des Moines Junction—later Midvale—and Fort Dodge Junction—later Hope) and, of course, set about electrifying that pivot section as part of the through Des Moines-Fort Dodge artery. Operating timetables covered both companies. A suit brought by minority shareholders of N&NW in the summer of 1907 further confused matters when they complained that majority stockholders intended "to swing matters so as to consolidate with the electric line...and freeze them out." The two roads stayed separate. One issue was patently clear, however: Hamilton Browne was completely absent from the scene (his term on the N&NW board expired on May 8, 1906). [1]

There was one more matter no longer in flux. Boone would be headquarters city with a small yard, engine facility and shop. A contract was let for a brick passenger depot on Story Street that in time would house the agent, chief engineer, signal department, and substation on the ground floor and office of the president, vice president, superintendent, dispatchers, electric/line departments, traffic solicitors, and timekeeper on the second floor. Local firms gained the contract for $18,000. [2]



Above: Boone would be the headquarters city for FtDDM&S with a substantial new facility that would serve as depot, general office, and even substation.

Above: The interurban makes a stop at Kelley on the new grade in 1907, the car's first year of service. *Ames Historical Society*

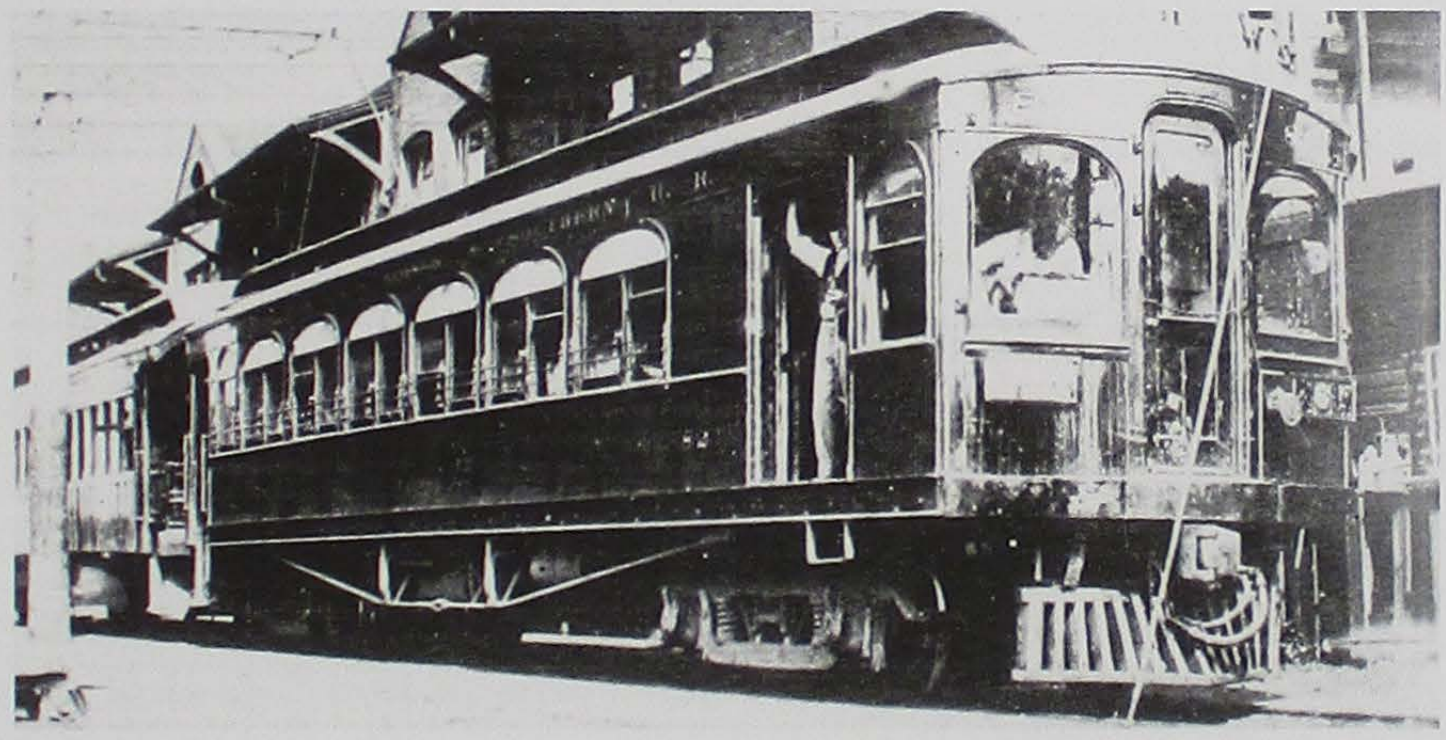
Nestled in the Des Moines River Valley 8.2 miles to the northwest was Fraser and site of the impressive power plant then under construction. It was admirably located for obtaining fuel and condensing water put through purifiers to reduce scale forming salts. The plant would feature three Babcock & Wilcox Aultman-Taylor-style horizontal water-tube boilers with extended furnaces to burn Iowa slack coal (supplied initially from a mine only 1,000 feet distant). The main power equipment to be employed were two 1250-kw Westinghouse-Parsons-type turbo-generators supplied with steam at 175 pounds from the boilers. The energy generated would be alternating, three-phase, 25 cycles at 2,300 volts stepped up to 20,000 volts for transmission to substations at Ankeny, Kelley, Boone, Fort Dodge Junction, and another just south of Fort Dodge. [3]

Passenger equipment—ten cars all from the Niles Car & Manufacturing Company of Niles, Ohio—arrived to great acclaim. They measured 53-feet 3 5/8 inches in length and 9 feet 4 inches in width. Each car sported 13 reversible seats upholstered in leather in the main compartment and 8 rattan-covered seats in the smoking section. Ahead was a baggage room of over 10 feet with sliding doors on each side as well as a tiny motorman's cab. Entrance to each car would be made through the sides of the rear vestibule. Train doors at each end facilitated passage from one car to another when coupled in multiple. Car bodies were mounted on Baldwin trucks with 36-inch wheels turned by four Westinghouse 75-hp direct current motors and outfitted with locomotive pilots, standard radial drawbars and couplers to permit coupling with steam railroad cars. Niles likewise furnished one 47-foot express car. [4]

Passenger trains were understood to be the public face of railroading so it was no surprise that Joseph Blake and his fellow managers put every effort into getting those elegant new cars into service as quickly as possible. A test run was made with one car on May 31, 1907, between Boone and Kelley—reportedly attaining the speed of 75 miles per hour before Blake ordered the

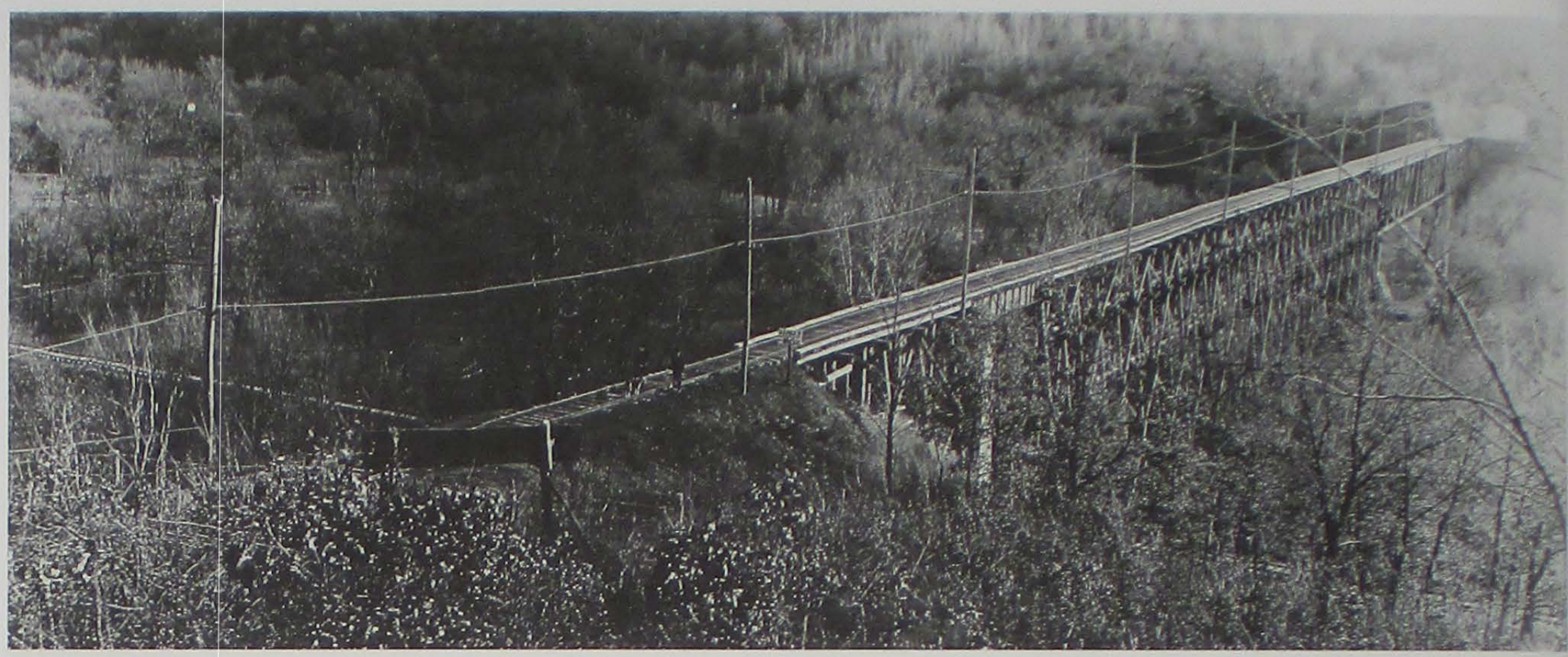
Above: Passengers alight from both sides of a Fort Dodge Line car at the intersection of Main and East in Ames. Note local streetcar in the distance.

motorman to slow down "because the gait was a trifle faster than he could stand." Then, on June 7, car 64 would have the honor of making the initial trip to Des Moines, expectant crowds meeting it all along the way. The press reported that Inter-Urban President H. H. Polk "piloted the party" into the city "where Joseph Blake hosted dinner at the Savery." Regular service began on the 10th—cars well stocked with eager passengers. Fares: 2¢ per mile one way; 1½¢ round trip; 500-mile books 1½¢ per mile. "Prospects for the company are exceedingly bright for a large business," urged a local observer. Small wonder. This was, after all, the age of railways and, as one writer put it, "people who ride on railroads—that is to say, all the people who are..." could only mean huge demand for just the kind of service FtDDM&S was designed to offer. The road immediately scheduled six daily round trips on the Boone-Des Moines run. [5]



Above: Pre-1916 view at Boone shows car 82 towing a steam railroad coach, possibly former Newton & Northwestern 62. *Ed Frank Collection*

Joseph Blake promised that the company "soon" would have trains running into Ames and out to the college. Indeed, effective July 26 the road offered seven turns per day between Des Moines and Ames. Business was good, very good indeed. The conductor often told the motorman to slow down so that all fares could be collected. An amazing 28 trains daily sprinted up and down the Des Moines-Kelley segment of the new thoroughfare—all dispatched by telephone from Boone. [6]



Above: A substantial steel deck truss bridge over the Des Moines River plus 761 feet of timber trestle in approach was required to get the "interurban" into Fort Dodge.

Prosecution in completion of the route above Boone proved vexatious in the extreme and occurred against the messy backdrop of the short but nasty currency panic of 1907 as well as the vicious anti-business hostility of the so-called Progressive Era. There was little to be done in relief of the roughly one per cent grade eastbound from Fraser to Boone and funds were inadequate to renew or replace bridges and trestles on either side of Fraser, but there was no choice but to cut down the nearly impossible four-and-one-half per cent grade westbound out of the Des Moines River valley and at the same time eliminate awful twenty-degree curves. It was as time consuming and expensive as it was necessary. Graders had a relatively easy time of it on new construction over slightly rolling prairie from Fort Dodge Jruction to Summit (16.2 miles), but the nearly four remaining miles upbound were cluttered with expensive engineering challenges. And Mother Nature turned contrarian by hurling relentless thunder storms to make the clay slippery and hard to work—in the process frustrating men and machines alike. [7]

Residents and civic leaders at Fort Dodge, long anxious for the vaunted benefits to be offered by the "interurban" were utterly dismayed by its tediously tardy arrival. The company, announcing plans for a $10,000 freight depot and office at 14th Street and 1st Avenue, briefly circulated a story that passenger operations would be in and out of the new Chicago Great Western depot at the head of Central Avenue. Scarcity of labor and material and continuing unpleasant weather continued to frustrate tracklaying but meanwhile bridge monkeys labored diligently to complete a steel deck truss bridge over the Des Moines River south of town and to finish 761 feet of timber trestles in the approaches. By September 23, track laborers and machines remained four miles from town and rains caused slides in the river valley. Delay was both irritating and expensive. "A couple of clear days and a little sunshine," said the *Messenger*, "would see the work finished and the track laid. And crews stringing wire for the trolley would be close behind." [8]

The great day would finally arrive and the city, the *Messenger* confidently predicted, would be "appropriately decorated for the occasion." And the occasion, it continued in exuberant expectation, "is worthy of it, marking as it does an era in the commercial life of the city as has nothing else since were laid the rails of the Illinois Central westward from the Mississippi [reaching Fort Dodge on August 16, 1869]". The thoroughly oxygenated writer could barely contain himself. "The interurban is a city builder, and today Fort Dodge occupies the unique distinction of being the northern terminus of the longest road in the state of Iowa." Moreover, "the coming of the interurban to this city from Des Moines demonstrated the fact that the builders are awake to the fact that Fort Dodge is destined to be one of the largest cities of the state." [9]

Above: The day finally arrived--October 5, 1907--and the "interurban" came to town.

So it was that on Saturday, October 5, the interurban finally came to town. One hundred strokes of the clock in the courthouse tower shortly after ten o'clock that morning announced to the city that the final spike had been driven. Flags and banners fluttered from windows, chimneys, and telephone poles. "Boom, Bang! Boost Fort Dodge! Nine Rahs for the Interurban!" But there were problems; the expectant car had difficulty negotiating curves on the street railway into town. Enthusiasm waned; long faces were pronounced. The band that had been summoned to celebrate the day disappeared. But finally, at 2:45 p.m., the car rounded into view from 12th Street and "all speed was put on and the big car shot down through Central Avenue whistle tooting, crowds cheering and banners flying." On board were company officials and dignitaries including John P. Dolliver and W. E. Duncombe among others—all of whom headed over to the Duncombe house "where plates were set at special table." The car remained at the public square and "before two hours had passed it had been looked over from end to end and top to bottom by hundreds of curious people." [10]

In fact the first trip was jury-rigged. The car began its trip from Boone and proceeded northward under catenary but wire had not yet been strung all the way to East Fort Dodge so a steam locomotive had been obliged to shove the car until the trolley pole could pull electricity from the lines of the Fort Dodge Street Railway. Clearly additional work would be required before regular service could be initiated. Trackmen continued to ballast and surface and electrical contractors put on finishing touches.

On October 25, FtDDM&S hosted a trip from Fort Dodge to Des Moines that took local shippers and public servants to the Iowa capital city in a way that officially opened the line. Upon arrival in Des Moines all hands were swept off to lunch at the Chamberlain and later the entire party "was again banqueted by the Commercial

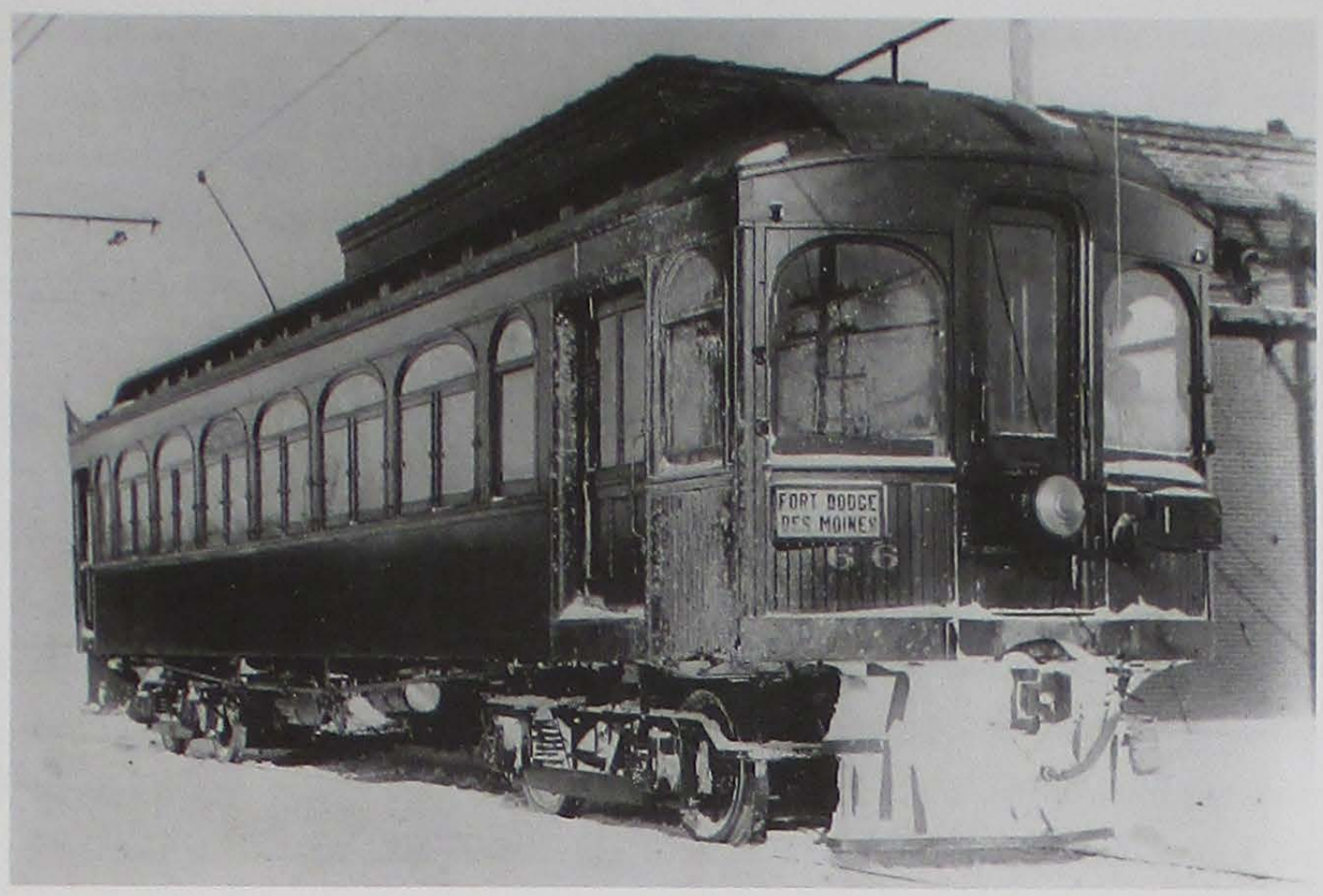
Above: In the early years of operation car 82 crosses the C&NW at Ankeny. *CERA Archives*

Club and the Greater Des Moines Committee, at which speeches were delivered by representatives of both cities." Guests reboarded the cars at 8:25 p.m., but stops were made at Boone "to look over the general offices of the railway and at Fraser to view the power house." It must have been a weary bunch that detrained in Fort Dodge, but the *Messenger* reported that "all in the party were unanimous their verdict that the interurban was equipped in the best possible manner to handle business, and every one of the Fort Dodge party considered it most fortunate the line had been completed at the present time." [11]

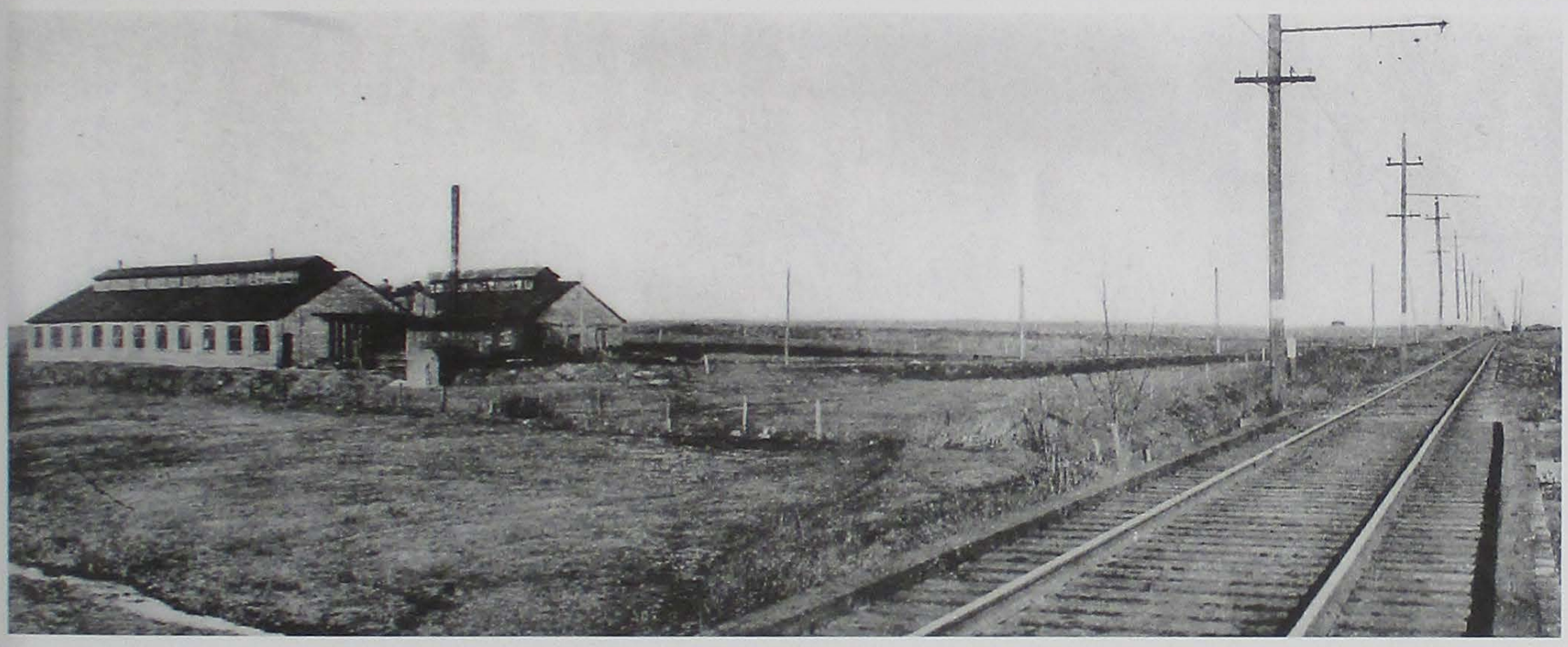
General Manager J. L. Blake announced that scheduled passenger operation would begin on Monday, November 4, with cars departing from the wye at Second Avenue South and Fourth Street, making stops along Central Avenue at the court house, post office, and Twelfth Street. The first trip every day would be at 7:00 a.m., cars running every two hours thereafter until the last one at 7:00 p.m. Stops also would be made in the country at crossings upon signal thus allowing rural residents to board the cars without the need to walk to established stations. No decision as yet regarding the road's Fort Dodge passenger depot; meanwhile the ticket office was located in the J. B. Hine drug store. "It is expected that the business both to and from the city will be enormous, many making business trips to Des Moines and to the pretty resorts south of the city, while trade will be brought here for many miles," enthused a local journalist. "The road will also be liberally patronized by the traveling men who visit this section of the state." [12]

Above: In 1909, FDL drove a short spur from above Fraser to reach coal reserves in and about Ogden.

Freight service seemed almost an afterthought. Blake late in October frankly stated: "We are not quite ready to say anything about our freight business until we get our station completed and the tracks and yard all in." Six weeks later the interlocker at the Chicago Great Western crossing was installed and tracklayers scurried to throw down spurs to Plymouth Clay Products and the Plymouth gypsum mill plus a transfer track to Illinois Central. The first freight train from Des Moines on December 30 brought in seven loads—an optimistic omen thought the road's newly appointed freight agent. For the present the road would operate one train daily in each direction. [13]



Above: The road would offer a steady parade of electrically-powered passenger cars shooting up and down the main line. Northbound car 70 paused only briefly at Ankeny. *George Niles collection.*



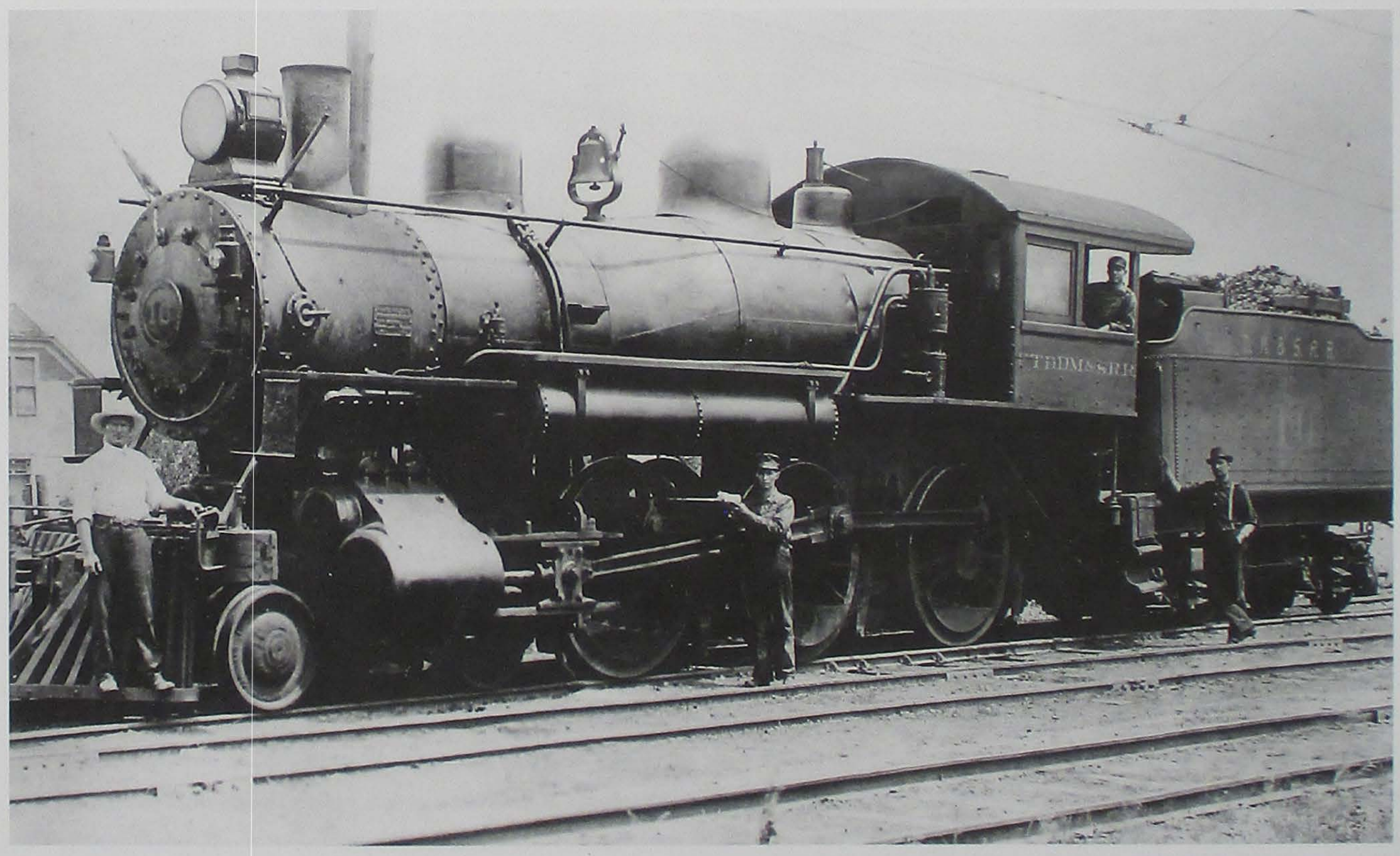
Above: FDL managers hoped to secure a bounty of local traffic especially at Fort Dodge, Des Moines, and Boone.

Bits of additional construction followed. In 1909 FDL gained the right to cross Illinois Central's busy artery east of Fort Dodge and then stretch its 2.1-mile Gypsum Spur another 7.5 miles to Brushy, ostensibly for the purpose of reaching more gypsum plants and more freight opportunities while at the same time providing handy carriage for laborers working there and living in East Fort Dodge. In the same year a five-mile line was driven southward from "Top of the Hill" above Fraser to Ogden and use of Minneapolis & St. Louis tracks for another two miles to gain access to coal mines that could be tapped to provide fuel for hungry furnaces of the Fraser power plant. The line out to Brushy was electrified and a substation built there; the Ogden branch likewise saw electrification, but it had a very short life. [14]

From the outset Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern presented itself, *Street Railway Journal* said, as a system that combined "the electrification of a steam road with new interurban construction." Its passenger, express, and freight tariffs and its operating features were to be "administered according to steam road practices."

Interline agreements were hammered out with steam carriers. Its lines intersected or made connection by indirection with every major horizontal railway company crossing Iowa with the result that, as *Railroad Gazette* maintained, "it should get considerable traffic as a distributor of the through traffic of the trunk lines that it crosses" in addition to "direct local traffic" to and from Fort Dodge, Boone, and Des Moines. Indeed, the road boasted that it had track connections with other roads at Newton, Colfax, Mingo, Cambridge, Kelley, Fraser Junction, Gowrie, Rinard, Rockwell City and with all roads diverging at Des Moines and Fort Dodge. On the face of it, that seemed quite curious since, as its freight business matured, multiple routing options might cause customers to short haul FDL. But the road's managers accepted that risk, betting on the future. In the short term, however, the entire operational arrangement was awkward—a steady parade of electrically-powered passenger cars shooting up and down the main stem of 84 miles between Des Moines and Fort Dodge and into and out of Ames, sharing those same lines with steam-powered freights and steam only on the Newton-Rockwell City trains of Newton & Northwestern. [15]

The Newton itself was a problem that defied easy and swift resolution. In 1906 Homer Loring had engineered corporate control of it by Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, by way of stock purchase. In the next fiscal year N&NW had gross operating receipts of $189,516 against operating expenses of $144,988, but for the next fiscal year only $124,818 in revenue and $132, 881 in expense for a net operating loss and a frightening operating ratio of 104.64. Employee numbers were slashed from 211 in 1907 to



Above: Operation by electricity and by steam was an intolerable burden that piled on expense that had to be eliminated.

132, taxes were unpaid, debt was not serviced, and the company slipped into receivership on June 8, 1908 with Parley Sheldon of Ames as receiver. [16]

Loring studied choices which were few and none of them palatable. The road scheduled but one daily-except-Sunday passenger turn from Newton to Rockwell City and but one local freight on Boone-Newton and Boone-Rockwell City segments. Its tiny equipment roster included 104 coal cars, three cabooses, one passenger coach and one combination car. Trimming service and reducing the size of the equipment inventory seemed out of the question. Income from passenger operation (tickets, express, mail) brought in less than four per cent of revenues, freight obviously dominating—coal leading among all commodities with half total tonnage, grain with roughly twenty per cent. The *Newton Herald* of January 18, 1907, noted that Campbell Brothers and two other parties had shipped five cars of cattle and one of hogs from Goddard. Yet livestock tonnage billed to or from N&NW stations aggregated less than two per cent of total. The company clearly was dependent on coal for freight traffic, but mines it served or received business from—the Colfax branch in particular—were near exhaustion. That likely explained why Loring tried in 1907 to sell the Colfax-Goddard-Newton portion of the road to Inter-Urban—to no avail. The other end of the line—Fort Dodge Junction (Hope) to Rockwell City, 27.1 miles—showed more promise but its prospects had to be weighed against the agonizing need to get out from under the intolerable need to run N&NW/FtDDM&S with a blend of steam and electric. [17]

Steam had to go and sooner the better. That would mean considerable savings by dumping the need to provide for and maintain two sets of motive power, but would add expense of acquiring freight motors. And could potential traffic on the Fort Dodge Junction-Rockwell City stub justify capital investment necessary in electrification? Most important of all, could Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern shoulder its own debt and that of Newton & Northwestern (which it purchased on March 31, 1909)?

And there was a sneaky joker in the deck. At the same time that the interurban infection swept across the state. Fort Dodge Wagon & Carriage Works advertised itself as "builder of fine carriages" and its local competitor, Mitchell Implement, offered customers the 1906 Style Brockway Buggy. But there was another twist. H. B. Graves Company announced that it had automobiles for rent—"competent drivers furnished." And in 1907 Fort Dodge Automobile Company saw fit to place a full page notice in the *Messenger* announcing that it had complete stock of Cadillac, Pope-Hartford, and Buick vehicles on hand—providing repairs for same. "The automobile craze doesn't abate," observed the *Messenger* on April 19; "Fort Dodge has $35,000 worth of these machines with prospects of more." A bit later the same newspaper observed that five men from the city were among others "planning a motor trip of Iowa." And a new dray line, Brady Transfer, opened offices in the Peschar Cigar store. The *Messenger* continued its traditional "Track & Trains" column but added a new one: "Automobiles in Fort Dodge: Chug on the Motor and Honk of the Horn" which simply oozed modernity. What it meant for the long term was unclear. [18]

Above: A test run was made on May 30, 1907, between Boone and Kelley. Regular service to Des Moines began on June 7.


BOXHOLM.
78
78

5

Receivership

Business was good right from the outset. For fiscal 1908, ,Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern had operating revenue of $119,677 and operating expenses of $78,401 with net operating profit of $41,276 and an admirable operating ratio of 67.7. In the next fiscal year operating revenue rose to $340,671, expenses tallying $219,110, producing net of $123,560. Freight receipts in 1908 had been tiny but in 1908 yielded $87,119 and prospects for greater freight earnings in the future looked very bright. [1]

And the property was essentially in good shape and ready for increased freight volume. The track was laid with 70-pound (per yard) rail, the bed was well ballasted and drained, interlocking plants guarded crossings with other railroads, and current was distributed by trolley wire suspended 21-feet-and-six-inches above rail to provide clearance for steam-powered trains. Fifteen new grain elevators, each one expected to produce about 150 carloads per year were sprinkled along the new route, stockyards had been built by the company at each town, clay and shale found near Fraser moved in gondola cars to on-line tile-making plants that billed out finished product, and FDL elbowed its way into several gypsum mills east of Fort Dodge. Three Baldwin-Westinghouse electric locomotives, each one equipped with four 150-hp Westinghouse motors provided with low gears adequate for hauling 1000-ton trains at 15 miles per hour were on hand with the promise of future orders as freight demand increased. At least $90,000 was put into improvements for the powerhouse at Fraser. New boilers were installed, the old ones rebuilt, and all were equipped with Green Automatic Stokers and grates. The old condensers with two thousand square feet of cooling surface were replaced with new ones of forty-eight hundred square feet of cooling space, and concrete wells and corrugated ingot iron pipe were employed from the powerhouse to the Des Moines River to ensure ample and permanent supply of water. [2]

It proved to be too much too fast. The cost of construction and equipage for electrified FtDDM&S was a staggering $33,863 per mile, but when Newton & Northwestern debt was rolled in Fort Dodge Line's debt and equity ballooned to an intolerable $75,981 per mile. On June 30, 1910, Homer Loring of Boston and Parley Sheldon of Ames, Iowa became co-receivers of the company. In fact, the company had failed to pay interest due on bonds from the summer of 1909. [3]

Rumors had owners of Inter-Urban seeking to acquire the Fort Dodge Line but the foreclosure suit brought by Old Colony Trust was really "friendly" for the purpose of effecting a reorganization and Federal Judge Smith McPherson would prove to be more than sympathetic—perhaps because the road had been clearing net profit (before taxes and debt service) and showed every indication of better performance in the future. For his part, Homer Loring was "all in." [4]

Above: Depots were the very heart of every rural community during the age of railways, the focal point, the funnel through which passed people, goods, and information, the prism through which country folk and their small town bretheren looked to the outside world. FDL's facility at Alleman was typical. *George Niles collection*

Indeed, Loring's velocity was full bore. One reason for investing more money at the Fraser power plant was to prepare for converting from 600-volt electrification to 1200-volt d.c., this to provide more adequate power for heavily-laden freight trains. Additional funds were allocated to reequip passenger cars and freighters so that they could operate on higher voltage, and five steeplecab electric freight locomotives were ordered from General Electric. Judge McPherson nodded in approval of all of it. [5]

This brought up the nettlesome question of what to do with non-electrified portions of the former Newton & Northwestern. Newton-Rockwell City passenger service was terminated to save money and replaced with a Boone-Newton turn and a round trip arrangement from Fort Dodge Junction to Rockwell City. Business volumes on the Newton end continued to deteriorate with the consequence that the company authorized only "occasional train service." That provoked an angry complaint from customers at Farrar and action by the Attorney General of Iowa who asked the Federal Court to authorize the receivers to borrow money "for the purpose of improving train service on said branch." Judge McPherson failed to see the wisdom. Loring may have at one point toyed with putting wire up on the 37.6 mile Newton-Des Moines Junction leg and, in fact, new piling was driven on some bridges in the summer of 1910; by fall, however, Loring decided to simply abandon the line in place and McPherson ultimately agreed. [6]

What of the Rockwell City segment? Freight business on that portion of the line was quite good—carloads of lumber, coal, clay brick and tile, grain, livestock, and even emigrant cars bearing the emigrant himself and all of his worldly possessions were routine. And in those days of modal monopoly merchandise cars were full of everything from pianos, buggies, wagons, harrows, and breaking plows to kegs of nails, boxes of wearing apparel, crates of tobacco, cans of cream, rolls of barbed wire, pails of paint, and coops of chickens. Loring was emboldened and the 26.9-mile Fort Dodge Junction-Rockwell City arm would be electrified with a substation incorporated with the interlocker at Rinard, the first car rolling into Rockwell City on December 24, 1910. [7]

There were two receivers, be it recalled, but Loring without question was dominant. His eyes constantly looked for opportunities. It was hardly a surprise that they landed on nearby Crooked Creek Railroad, a tiny operation with an interesting history—the brainchild of Walter C. Willson. Born in New York in 1824 and educated there, Willson twenty years later headed

west, to Wisconsin, where he bought land, built a store and a hotel, started a saw mill, and in the process accumulated a tidy cash egg that he took with him to Iowa in 1855, ending up in what today is Webster City. There he reapplied his Wisconsin formula—buying land, building and operating a saw mill and a flour mill, making a profit from each venture. He left in 1861 to enter the commission business at Chicago, returning to Iowa in time to gain a grading contract from the Illinois Central predecessor heading across the state through Webster City to Fort Dodge, then built an opera house and a hotel, threw up a large number of residential homes—all of it in Webster City—and bought large tracts of prospective coal lands at Lehigh, on the Des Moines River southwest of Webster City and southeast of Fort Dodge. [8]

Above: Crooked Creek was the brain child of Walter C. Willson. He was indefatigable.

Coal in the Lehigh area along the river and its tributaries had been worked by early settlers by simply drifting straight into hillsides, propping up ceilings with posts and planks, taking what they needed. Willson concluded that some of these veins were thick enough and numerous enough to warrant commercial exploitation but that meant the need to find adequate conveyance to market. It was for that purpose that Crooked Creek Railroad sprang to life, chartered on November 8, 1875, and placed in operation on October 8, 1876, with a nine-mile narrow gauge (three-foot) line dropped southward from a point on the Illinois Central (Judd) through a slight depression in the prairie's crust that quickly became a ravine carved through clay and shale that required crossing and re-crossing nine times (with nine trestles) all within a single mile-and-one-half before terminating on the east bank of the Des Moines River at Lehigh. (The river would be bridged in 1878 and the line extended and twisted westward twice over Crooked Creek to mines and to Lehigh Clay Products.) It was a crude affair—one creaky 16 3/4-ton locomotive, one express-baggage car, and twenty-two coal cars that trundled over brittle 30-pound rail and for fiscal 1879 moved 4,259 tons of freight (mostly coal) and 913 passengers to garner $4,046 in revenue against $7,047 in operating expense. [9]

Walter Willson was undaunted. The road was standard-gauged in 1880 (effective November 8) and, to lengthen hauls and to extend reach, Willson on October 31, 1883, saw to the creation of Webster City & Southwestern Railroad with a charter to outfit a 13.5-mile finger from Webster City to Border Plain, about midway between Judd and Lehigh on the original route, and with connecting tracks at Webster City to both Illinois Central and Chicago & North Western and new stations en route at Flugstad and Brushy. Surveying began in 1884, right-of-way was acquired, and grading was initiated, but financing proved awkward and the line did not enter service until late in 1886. It was leased to Crooked Creek for operation, failed to meet interest due on bonds, was foreclosed, and purchased for $85,000 by Crooked Creek in 1890. Shortly thereafter the five-mile segment from Judd to Border Plain was abandoned in place and thereafter Crooked Creek was a 17.5-mile pike from Webster City to the farthest mine beyond Lehigh. [10]

For fiscal 1886, Crooked Creek suffered net operating loss of $2,146 and to that nagging irritation was invasion of its highly abbreviated service territory by much larger Mason City & Fort Dodge which thrust its tentacles into Lehigh from Fort Dodge, gained concessions from the town of Lehigh, and secured permission from the Iowa Board of Railroad Commissioners for two crossings of Crooked Creek tracks to gain competitive

access to local shippers. It was a bitter pill. And then the same regulatory body fussed loudly that although Crooked Creek was a common carrier it was "also a merchant, enqaged in the business of merchandising, buying and selling goods, mining, transporting and selling coal, etc.; that to facilitate its own private business, it has erected coal houses on its own terminals at Webster City, to the exclusion of all other parties, and has a monopoly of the coal business at that point." In sum, said the bureaucrats, Crooked Creek had "departed from its general business of a common carrier" and they frowned on that. Willson would have to provide for competitors at both Lehigh and Webster City but he did not separate Crooked Creek Coal Company from Crooked Creek Railroad. [11]

Above: Fortunes for Crooked Creek ebbed and flowed but mostly ebbed. How long would coal deposits hold out?

Crooked Creek turned in continuous and depressing net deficits from operation from 1888 through 1896 and had another skirmish with Mason City & Fort Dodge in 1892. In the next year some observers calculated that Willson, behind the scenes, was angling to lure Winona & Southwestern from its terminus at Osage on another 80 miles or so to Webster City—maybe with the idea of merging or at least connecting the two roads. Meanwhile, Crooked Creek scheduled daily-except-Sunday maid-of-all-work round trips from Webster City to Lehigh; rail on the Judd-Border Plains line was finally taken up in 1898. [12]

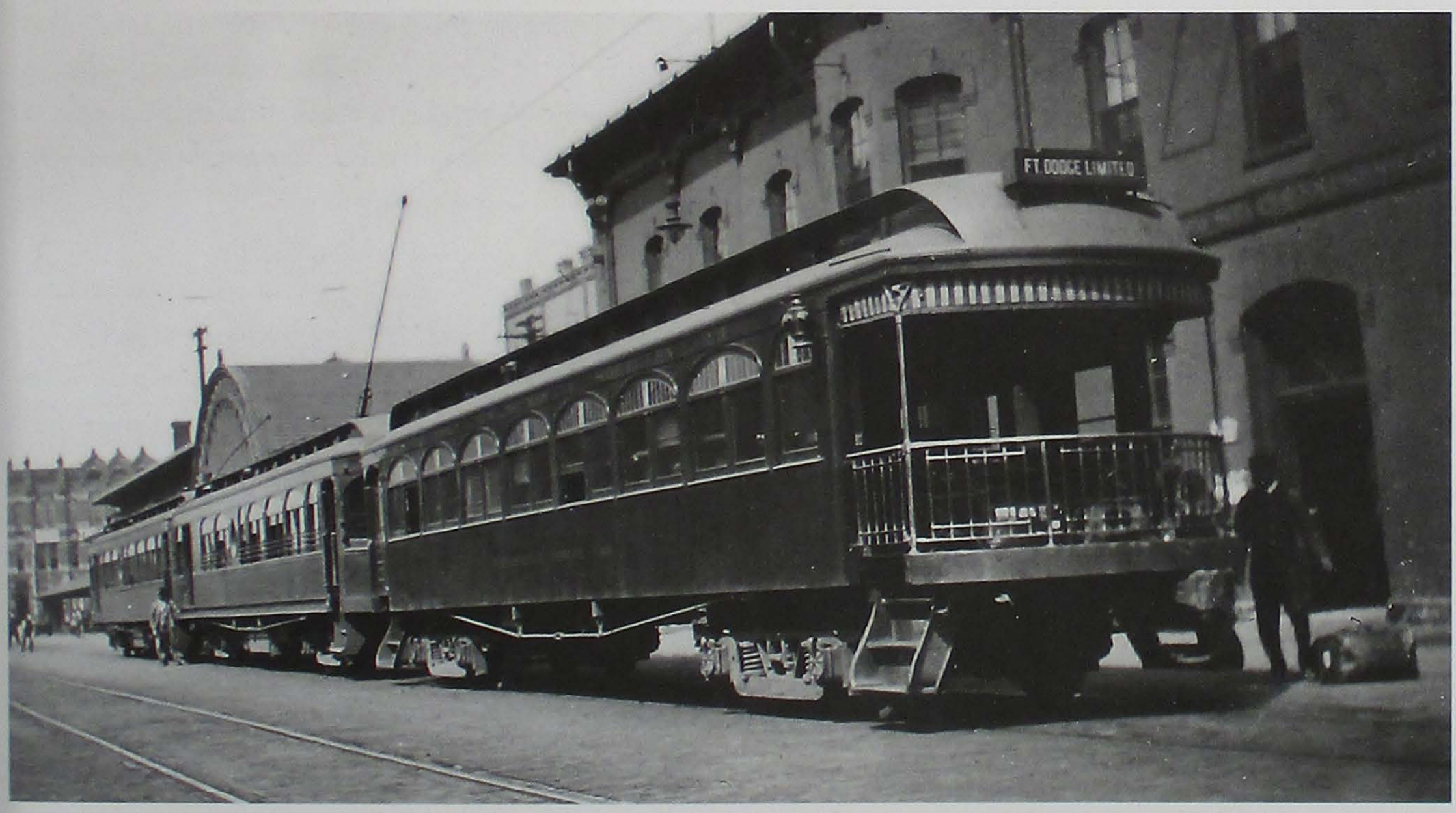
The tall, well-built 76-year-old Walter Willson held the presidency of Crooked Creek but he hardly was chained to his desk. Indeed, it was impossible to differentiate him from any of the road's eighteen employees for he could be found in the locomotive cab, spotting cars, inserting ties, or taking up tickets. On August 17, 1900, he was helping others unload cinder ballast at a low spot in the track. Sad to say, the car tipped over on him ending his life. The senior management post went to Willson's only son, Frank E., but he had not his father's passion, was sickly, and would die on March 29, 1907. Hired general managers dealt with day-to-day operations. [13]

Fortunes for Crooked Creek ebbed and flowed. It registered a horrific operating ratio of 150.01 for 1899, lost money again in 1900, but except for 1904 and 1908 posted profits from operation in every year of that decade. In 1905 and again in 1906 and 1907 there were juicy rumors as to new ownership and new direction.

One had a Milwaukee syndicate lengthening Crooked Creek southwestward from Lehigh to Gowrie, 15 miles, and attractive connections there with Chicago & North Western, Minneapolis & St. Louis, Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific, and Newton & Northwestern. That rumor had a corollary: Crooked Creek stretching out from Brushy to Fort Dodge, 12 miles. Other gossip contended that Rock Island would pick off Crooked Creek; that Des Moines capitalist F. M. Hubbell wanted the property and would electrify it; and, that a local group of investors would capture the road and expand it to Dayton and then secure trackage rights over Minneapolis & St. Louis on to interchange with Chicago & North Western at Ogden. And on the very day that the first interurban rumbled into Fort Dodge General Manager Blake of FtDDM&S announced firmly that his company fully intended to thrust itself into the Lehigh market from near the gypsum mills near Fort Dodge. [14]

Was there merit to any of this? Lehigh certainly had become an important industrial center with traffic flowing from Sam McClure Coal Mines, mines of Crooked Creek Railroad & Coal Company, Lehigh Clay Works, James Campbell Brick & Tile, Twin Cities Brick, Corey Pressed Brick, and Lehigh Brick & Tile "all sizes of sewer pipe." Coal in substantial lots moved out to customers located on connecting roads—Illinois Central, Chicago Great Western, and Chicago & North Western. The elevator at Flugstad shipped out grain and the lumber yard there received all nature of building materials. Crooked Creek at Webster City served important trackside customers—F. G. Stearns Flour & Feed, Webster City Bottling Works, Closz & Howard Manufacturing, and Webster City Steel Radiator as well as others utilizing the company's team track. [15]

Homer Loring certainly studied Crooked Creek and pondered its potential utility. *Electric Railway Journal* on April 9, 1910, stated that negotiations were being conducted for the sale of Crooked Creek to FtDDM&S and the *Webster City Journal* endlessly proclaimed as much—confidently asserting that "cars will be running into Webster City within a few months" to give the city "direct interurban connections with Des Moines via Fort Dodge." Crooked Creek did change hands on December 10, 1910, "reportedly passing to FtDDM&S but no authoritative financial source made such a claim. New owners (many of these the same



Above: Elegance. This FtDDM&S train--note the parlor car--stands proudly before Rock Island's capacious passenger station in downtown Des Moines.

Above: FtDDM&S sought to maintain schedules no matter how inclement the weather might have been. No. 66 stops for passengers at Ericson while express motor 84 takes the siding. Circa 1912. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

as before) were, it might be said, sympathetic to Loring and Fort Dodge Line. In any event, Crooked Creek continued on as a separate corporation under its original charter with Milwaukee interests and FtDDM&S representatives (but not Loring) on the board of directors. Amalgamation into FDL and electrification would have to wait. **16**

Crooked Creek, of course, was not the sole matter of importance for Homer Loring and his lieutenants. Workmen in the shop at Boone showed their innovative talent by cobbling together a home-built electric switch engine "suitable," said *Electric Traction Weekly*, "for work on short curves with short wheel base." And money amazingly was scrounged to fund automatic block signals from Roberts to East Fort Dodge, 5 miles, and Fraser to Boone, 8.2 miles (it was short lived). Loring no doubt hoped additional monies could be raised by sale of the now moribund piece of railroad from Newton to Des Moines Junction, and Iowa Central in 1911 did make a thorough study of it, but in the end shrewdly stepped away and the line remained abandoned in place with the Federal Court's concurrence. **17**

On March 22, 1911, receivers' certificates in the amount of $720,000 were authorized by Judge McPherson to provide what *Poor's Manual* characterized as "improvements, extensions, etc." Overexhuberant observers in the area may have thought those funds would be employed by FtDDM&S to pay for surveys that *Railway Age* in May claimed were "being made to build an extension from Fort Dodge, Iowa, northwest to Spirit Lake, about 85 miles"—a tantalizing scheme with little merit that seemed imperishable. Monies were expended in 1911-1912, however, for a new route southward from Ankeny to Swanwood Junction, 5.7 miles, and a new entrance into Des Moines by way of trackage rights over a Rock Island predecessor and CRI&P itself to that road's capacious passenger station downtown.

Capital expenditures were necessary, in addition to construction costs attendant to the new line, for electrification of that new line as well as for electrification including poles and wire over tracks of the steam road into Des Moines. Still more expenditures were demanded for new substations at Swanwood, Harcourt, and East Fort Dodge; those at Ankeny, Fort Dodge Junction, and Roberts then retired. Service on the new route began on November 17, 1912 permitting abandonment of the original route and cancellation of the earlier arrangement with Inter-Urban for use of its tracks and terminals. [18]

Judge Smith McPherson was in agreement with all of this and he gave his permission when confronted with a proposal for a massive program to improve the entire troublesome portion of line from Boone through Fraser and up the hill out of the Des Moines River valley. This included renewing several trestles carrying rail over deep ravines that drained great swaths of prairie or replacing them with concrete or steel culverts. Most demanding of all was the spindly 800-foot long, 156-foot high timber trestle 2.25 miles above Boone; it squeaked and trembled with every passing train and resulted in a fierce demand from management that all trains moving over it absolutely not exceed five miles an hour. Replacement was as necessary as it was expensive. It was amazingly accomplished in only 95 days in 1912 and without interrupting traffic. The splendid new 784-foot-long structure built on the same one per cent tangent grade consisted of deck-plate girder spans supported on two masonry abutments and seven steel towers. [19]

Above: Car 64 waits on a siding at an unknown location in 1912 with a string of boxcars in the background. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Homer Loring's list of projects or suggested expenditures seemed endless. In the early summer of 1913 *Electric Railway Journal*, apparently in sober earnestness, asserted that Loring personally was hustling money to, in fact, complete an electric railway as an extension of FtDDM&S to Spirit Lake—this, the *Journal* went on, by agreement to electrify the Minneapolis & St. Louis line up from Fort Dodge to Livermore and then the Rock island line beyond to Spirit Lake. It was absurd. But in Fort Dodge Loring did find property that could well be used for a fine three-story brick structure passenger depot at Central Avenue and Eleventh Street. [20]

Could all of these substantial expenditures be justified? Yes, Fort Dodge Line in fiscal 1910 put up a net profit from operation before debt service and taxes. It was in the black for 1911 and 1912, and in 1913 it posted net income after debt and taxes of $148,223. Freight volume had grown much faster than anticipated—one source in 1912 claiming that the road was offered 1000 tons of plaster products from American Cement Plaster, Wasam Plaster, United States Gypsum, and Plymouth Gypsum (all southeast of Fort Dodge) as well as 2000 tons of coal every business day. In fiscal 1910 passenger revenue (tickets, mail, express) totaled $260,920, freight $195,022. Three years later passenger revenue rose to $353,976, freight to $359,295. As early as 1907 *Railway Age* had observed that there was "growing disposition among trolley road managers to build heavier and better equipped electric railroads, and to pay more attention to freight business." Homer Loring was one of those trolley road managers. The future looked bright. [21]

Judge Smith McPherson thought as much. On September 10, 1913, he ordered that Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern be sold for not less than $2.67 million. Local observers wondered if giant and at that time very aggressive Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific might make a bid but that did not happen and on October 31 the Fort Dodge Line was sold to Old Colony Trust for $3.9 million. As the *Boone News Republican* blandly observed: "Present bond holders will continue to control the road." [22]

6

Well Pollinated & Highly Oxygenated

These were the salad days for Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. Intercity passenger business boomed, streetcars at Fort Dodge and Ames were packed, freight motors purred busily up and down the system to meet burgeoning demand for carriage of all kinds of lading, one or two switch engines were necessary around the clock at Fort Dodge for customer needs and to make up and break up trains. The auditor at Boone diligently tallied financial reports that put broad smiles on the faces of managers and investors alike. Salad days indeed.

Above: Passenger offerings were mostly prosaic--one car assigned to most main line runs. Hope, 1911.

Revenue from ticket sales exploded from $249,035 in 1910 to $429,908 in 1916, dropping back to $420,822 in 1918. Total passenger revenue (tickets, mail, express) leapt from $260,920 in 1910 to $447,583 in 1916, dropping slightly to $437,737 two years later. "Electric interurban lines may be made profitable," argued *Railway Age*, "even when the average travel is not enough to half fill a single car on each trip." That may have been the case for Fort Dodge Line since the average fare collected in 1916, for instance,

was a paltry 22.8¢. In any event, the road found it necessary in 1912 to rebuild one of its baggage cars into a side-entrance three-compartment "passenger and express car" for shuttle service on the 27-mile Hope (formerly Fort Dodge Junction) to Rockwell City leg, connecting with Des Moines-Fort Dodge cars every other hour. In 1916 the road took delivery of car number 62 from American Car Company—this one to join the collection of Niles cars already employed in main line service. And in 1912 FDL acquired a handsome parlor-observation piece from Jewett Car Company. It sported a clerestory roof, inlaid mahogany interior, bronze chandeliers, art glass gothic arch windows, and a brass-railed rear observation platform. A similar car arrived later to be paired in twice-daily operation in each direction as part of main line through trains—25¢ extra fare and staffed by a porter. By 1918 the inventory of passenger equipment included 13 powered cars, 2 parlors, and 10 former steam road coaches employed as interurban trailers. [1]

Powered cars were modified over time. An out-sized headlight was mounted at the train door opening, a destination sign was positioned below the righter front window, a train number indicator was mounted on the opposite side, an authoritative bell perched above the motorman's cab, an extra trolley pole appeared at the front end, and for winter months an impressive sheet-steel plow was mounted over the wood pilot. The initial color scheme was Pullman green, later changed to a dull boxcar red. [2]

Passenger offerings were mostly prosaic—one car assigned to each main line run, the exception being special occasions such as the annual State Fair at Des Moines when multiple cars were authorized and, of course, the twice daily trains with parlor cars. Trains would stop at any road crossing to pick up or let off passengers. Farmers might ride into town with a pail of cream in one hand and an empty kerosene can on the other, returning home after business transactions accomplished on the next car. Fare: 10¢. The education of children beyond country school grades might be accomplished by taking the cars to high schools at Gowrie or Rockwell City as examples. That pattern was routine at Fraser where, after completion of eight grades, students often headed off to Boone High School. [3]

Mail and express revenue was not large ($11,323 in 1912, $16,915 in 1918), but important nevertheless to the company and the service absolutely vital to the public. Express billings ranged from exotic to mundane—precious metals, jewelry, money, live birds, fish, dressed game and fowl in season, nursery stock, cut flowers, Coca-Cola syrup, cheese, ice cream, baked good, fresh milk and cream, and newspapers, among many other items. A great volume of goods poured out from manufacturers and wholesalers to local retail outlets, Younker Brothers and the Utica in Des Moines, the Boston Store and Gates in Fort Dodge to mention only a few. [4]

RECEIPT FOR FREIGHT. Form 0510 PBO 1253

CONSIGNEE C. Peterson Huxley Ia STATION Huxley 1914

DESTINATION VIA

RECEIVED IN GOOD ORDER OF THE **FORT DODGE, DES MOINES & SOUTHERN RAILROAD COMPANY**

THE FORT DODGE LINE

FREIGHT AS SPECIFIED BELOW WAY-BILLED FROM Des Moines Ia VIA

DATE OF WAY-BILL	NO. OF PKGS.	ARTICLES AND MARKS	WEIGHT	RATE	FREIGHT	ADVANCES
8/22 1914						
SERIES AND NUMBER OF WAY-BILL 531		150 pc L.h.				
CAR INITIALS AND NUMBER FW 35780		1 Ea Windows	2400	85	1.85	
CONSIGNOR Cent Lbr Co.						
CONNECTING LINE REFERENCE						
ORIGINAL CAR						
ORIGINAL WAY-BILL NUMBER						
ORIGINAL POINT OF SHIPMENT						

Receiver's Signature

CONSIGNEE

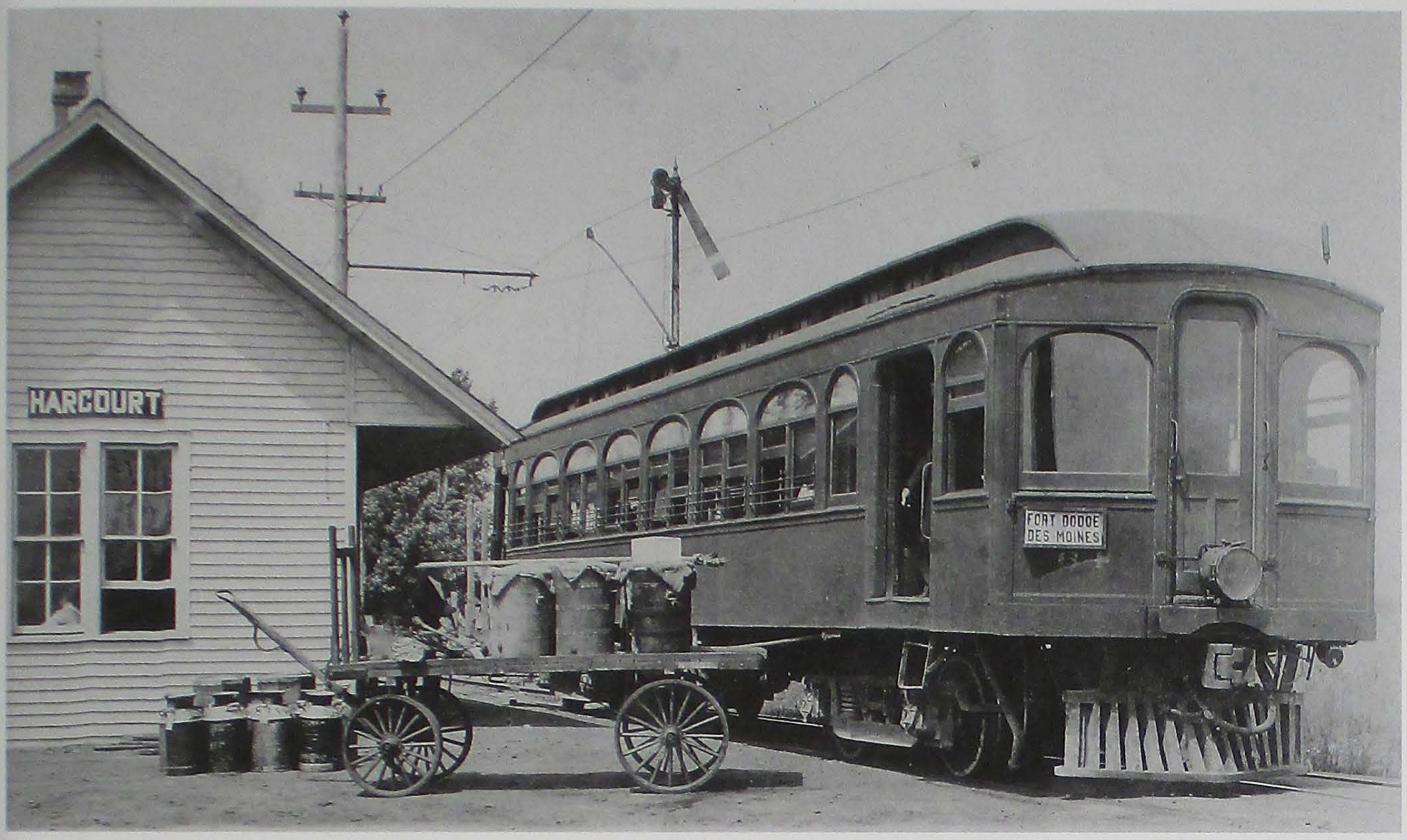
191

TOTAL TO COLLECT 1.85

DRAYAGE

All carloads shall be subject to a minimum charge for trackage and rental of $1.00 per car for each 24 hours detention, or fractional part thereof, after the expiration of 48 hours from arrival at destination.

Above: All nature of goods, large and small, passed through the freight houses of Fort Dodge Line as this 1914 receipt from Huxley suggests.



Above: The stillness around Harcourt station is briefly broken as No. 64 pauses long enough to take on express shipments waiting on the platform. Circa 1912.

Express companies (American Express on FtDDM&S) were essential to the life of retail businesses-goods delivered after orders had been taken by traveling salesmen, "drummers" or "knights of the grip," as they were called. Most drummers were employed by wholesale houses whose business had expanded with the railroad industry: their number nationally increased by a factor of six between 1880 and 1920. Armour & Company, the great meat packer, employed 4,000. Des Moines firms in 1915 put 500 knights of the grip into the territory; Fort Dodge's Green-Wheeler Shoe Company had five men on the road "drumming up business." The registry of these salesmen was expansive: farm implements, ready to wear clothing, groceries, fruit, meat packers, harness and leather, iron and steel, jewelry, lumber, rugs and carpet, hardware, tobacco and candy (Loomis-Woodward of Fort Dodge as an example), paint and varnish, door and window and so on. The interurban was a godsend for these peddlers because they could profitably utilize its frequent service to shuttle back and forth and make several calls each day. Orders in hand, the salesman restowed his sample cases, returned to the depot where he had arrived at an earlier hour, "wired" or called his orders to headquarters, bought a ticket to his next stop and (with his trunks safely deposited up ahead) now "dusted the cushions" in the smoker. Meanwhile, orders received, his firm dispatched billed goods that evening or the next day by express or by freight in less-than-carload (LCL) lots, perhaps arriving in "trap" or "package" cars routinely attached to local freights. [5]

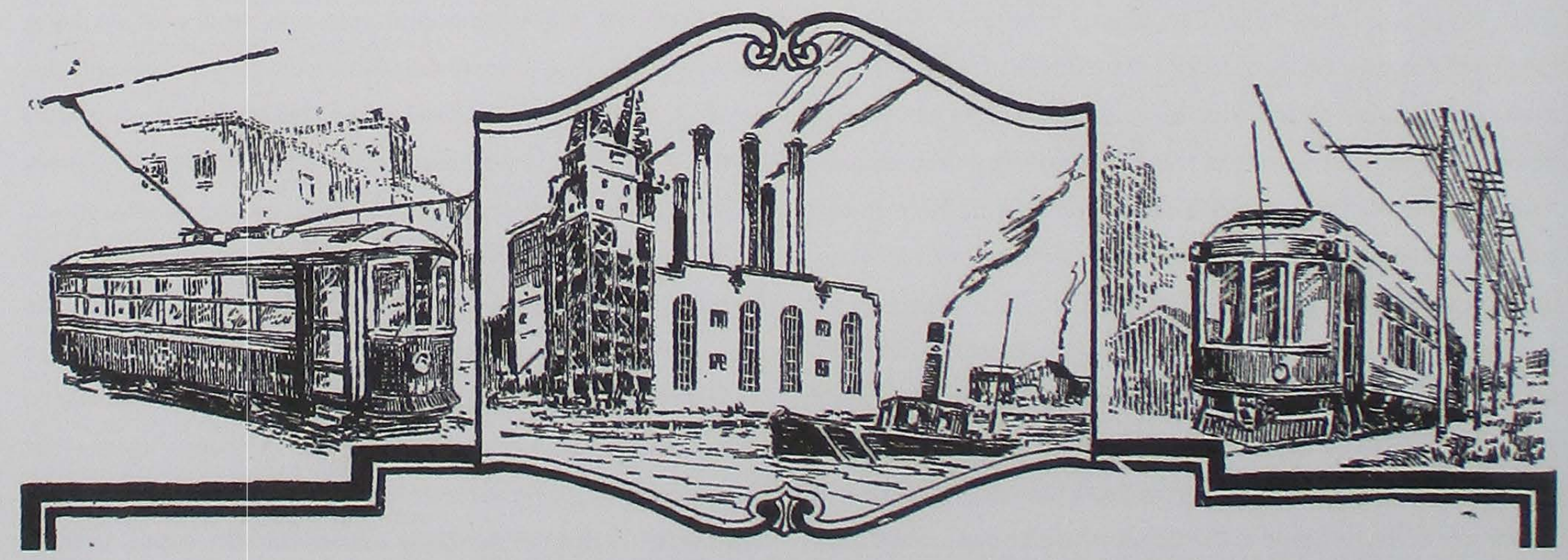
Most Fort Dodge Line stations were non-agency, i.e., no depot and no agent, but on the main line there were eleven open agencies including terminals at Fort Dodge and Des Moines. Depots were the very heart of every rural community during the age of railways, the focal point, the funnel through which passed people, goods, and information, the prism through which country folk and small town residents looked to the outside world. The depot set the tempo for the entire community. The railroad held legal title to the building, of course, but the depot belonged emotionally to townspeople and their country kin. The company's agent—the "depot agent" as he was universally labeled—was a pillar in the community. A distinct mystique surrounded the depot, with its coal-burning pot-bellied stove in the waiting room, and its dark,

dank, and dingy freight house. For those who recognized that "city life" began at the ticket counter there was great allure; those who were fearful of the outside and its worldly influence were frightened by it. "Train time" always provoked excitement—an opportunity for locals to "meet the train," to watch its arrival, to view the hubbub, to see who got on and off, to see the car "highball out of town," indeed to practice one of the great social institutions in rural America at the time. [6]

Aboard those cars could be found persons from every stratum of society and representatives of every vocation. There were especially happy occasions when bridal couples leaving on their honeymoon waved cheery goodbyes to rice-throwing well wishers on the platform; there were especially sad occasions when mourners accompanied the remains of a loved one reposing ahead in the baggage compartment. Hundreds of inductees in 1917-1918 detrained at Des Moines to be moved on by Inter-Urban to nearby Camp Dodge for military training as part of America's participation in the Great War. And female inmates were delivered to the Women's Reformatory at Rockwell City. Students heading for Iowa State Teachers College used the cars to Fort Dodge and later to Webster City, Illinois Central on to Cedar Falls; others, en route to State University of Iowa were ticketed to Des Moines, Rock Island to Iowa City. Still others crammed every piece of rolling stock when the school year began or ended at Iowa State College near Ames. [7]

A large area of wetland (swamps and sloughs) ran across much of central and north central Iowa—much of it bypassed by early agriculturalists who, if they were attracted at all, used these areas for grazing or cut the natural hay as a cash crop. But the advent of steam-powered dredges and inexpensive clay tile meant that this rich, soggy soil could be made productive of cereal grains and row crops. "Drain tiles pay their costs every two years and last forever," claimed one important manufacturer. The *Fort Dodge Messenger* vigorously proclaimed advantages of tiling farm land. "No owner of high priced Iowa land can afford to let it remain wet," asserted the *Messenger*. Large bodies of swampy sloughs bordered much of FtDDM&S trackage. Blair's Lake, three miles above Harcourt may have been the largest, although there were many other sloughs near Gowrie and elsewhere along the line to Rockwell City. Not surprisingly, big steam dredges over time found great utility in Webster and Calhoun counties. [8]

Clay suitable for manufacture of brick and tile was found widely distributed around the state. By 1905, there were 302 producers turning out common brick, face brick, paving brick, and fire brick in addition to sewer tile, drain tile, hollow brick tile, and silo tile. The industry ranked tenth in investment among the state's manufacturers. Major production centered along the Des Moines River valley. Plants served by FDL near Webster City and Fort Dodge and at Lehigh produced high quality products with a semi-glaze finish to withstand pressure of freezing and thawing. In addition to building



Above: In January 1912, the company was forced to call out this steam-powered work extra to clear the line. Trailing is an electric-powered freight and behind it is a passenger car.

material, these companies likewise provided huge tonnage in drain tile used throughout the region. These revenues, certainly important in the short term, were insignificant compared to the regular and impressive stream of income that would be received from the movement of grains as more and more land was put to agricultural production. [9]

Indeed Midwestern agriculture blossomed abundantly during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The nation's general economy, too, was robust, except for a blip in 1907. Good feeling was easy to detect close at hand. "The state of Iowa has grown from a wilderness to a great agricultural and industrial commonwealth in the allotted life of man," exclaimed William C. Brown, president of powerful New York Central. True enough. "Business depends upon buying power," affirmed a commercial journal in Des Moines, "and Iowa's people are prosperous and have power." That, too, was true enough. Des Moines, Boone, and Fort Dodge were growing nicely, fed, so to speak, by the vibrant prosperity of the hinterland. [10]

A sparkling demand for Iowa's agricultural products explained the local euphoria. Powerful requirements to satisfy domestic needs were augmented by an enormous overseas demand for cereals and meat. By 1914, Iowa's gross farm income escalated to more than a half billion dollars—8.71 per cent of the nation's total. Moreover, the value of Iowa's farm property exploded by more than 100 per cent between 1900 and 1910. And Iowa's farmers began to embrace labor saving machinery such as corn pickers which, in turn, tended to drive up productivity per man hour. The purchase of such machinery from a local implement dealer served to charge that community's economy but it also set off positive ripples reaching nearby or distant manufacturing centers to reaffirm the strong rural/urban symbiosis. Railroads such as FtDDM&S provided the essential intervening link. [11]

Increased billings of agricultural commodities certainly did help lift system freight receipts which grew nicely from $297,841 in 1912 to $529,177 in 1916, dipping to $496,614 in 1918. Coal still dominated in tonnage with six mines in Boone County producing 146,689 tons in 1919, but increasingly FDL

handled coal mined in other counties or in other states and destined for the powerhouse at Fraser, for kilns of various brick and tile firms, or for a host of mundane customers large and small up and down the line. Heavy tonnage also emanated from the several plaster mills around Fort Dodge (Iowa's production was excelled only by that of New York), and from clay products concerns ($2 million annual output of drain tile alone from Iowa plants). **12**

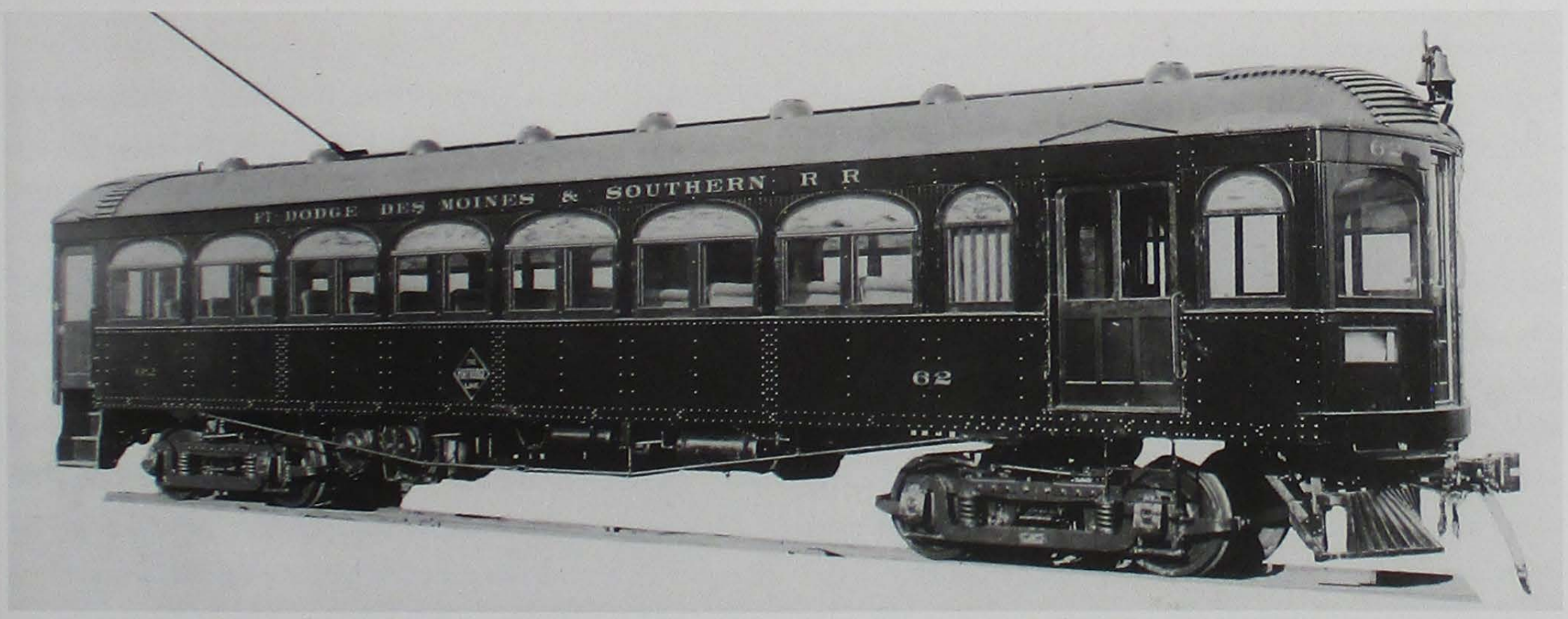
A. B. Cole of Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing argued earnestly that electric railways should position themselves to haul more and more freight by expanding terminal facilities, increasing motive power and rolling stock inventories, and working out interchange arrangements with steam roads. Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern was a poster child for all of it. The company long had committed to constructing transfer tracks, forming through routes and publishing joint tariffs with all comers, and working cooperatively with every steam carrier. At Des Moines, for instance, FDL utilized the Iowa Transfer Pool Yard to make connection with Inter-Urban; Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific; Chicago Great Western; Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; and, Des Moines Union—through the latter to reach Chicago & North Western; Wabash; Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul; and, Minneapolis & St. Louis. And, at Wolf, FDL agreed with M&StL to split agency expense on the "basis of the ratio in which business was transacted by the respective companies." At the same time money was authorized for any number of important purposes. Five 40-ton steeplecab motors arrived in 1911, two 60-ton freighters in 1912, and two 60-ton boxcab swivel-truck types in 1915; by 1916 the roster totaled 13 freight motors. The freight car inventory rose from 445 in 1912 to 2,462 in 1918—many sources claiming that this was more than any other electric railroad. And the company's boxcars had FORT DODGE, DES MOINES & SOUTHERN boldly stenciled in huge letters on the sides. Neither was the physical plant ignored. In 1916, the original Howe truss bridge and 692-foot approach to and over the Des Moines River six miles west of Boone was replaced with steel deck-girder spans with 357 feet of fill—most of the work accomplished by company forces. Not incidentally two snow plows were added to address the vicissitudes of Iowa winters. **13**

Above: Many persons inbound off the Lehigh-Webster City branch no doubt availed themselves of streetcar utility provided by the Fort Dodge Street Railway, a wholly-owned subsidiary operating twenty-minute headways employing heavy double-truck two-man cars. *George Niles collection.*

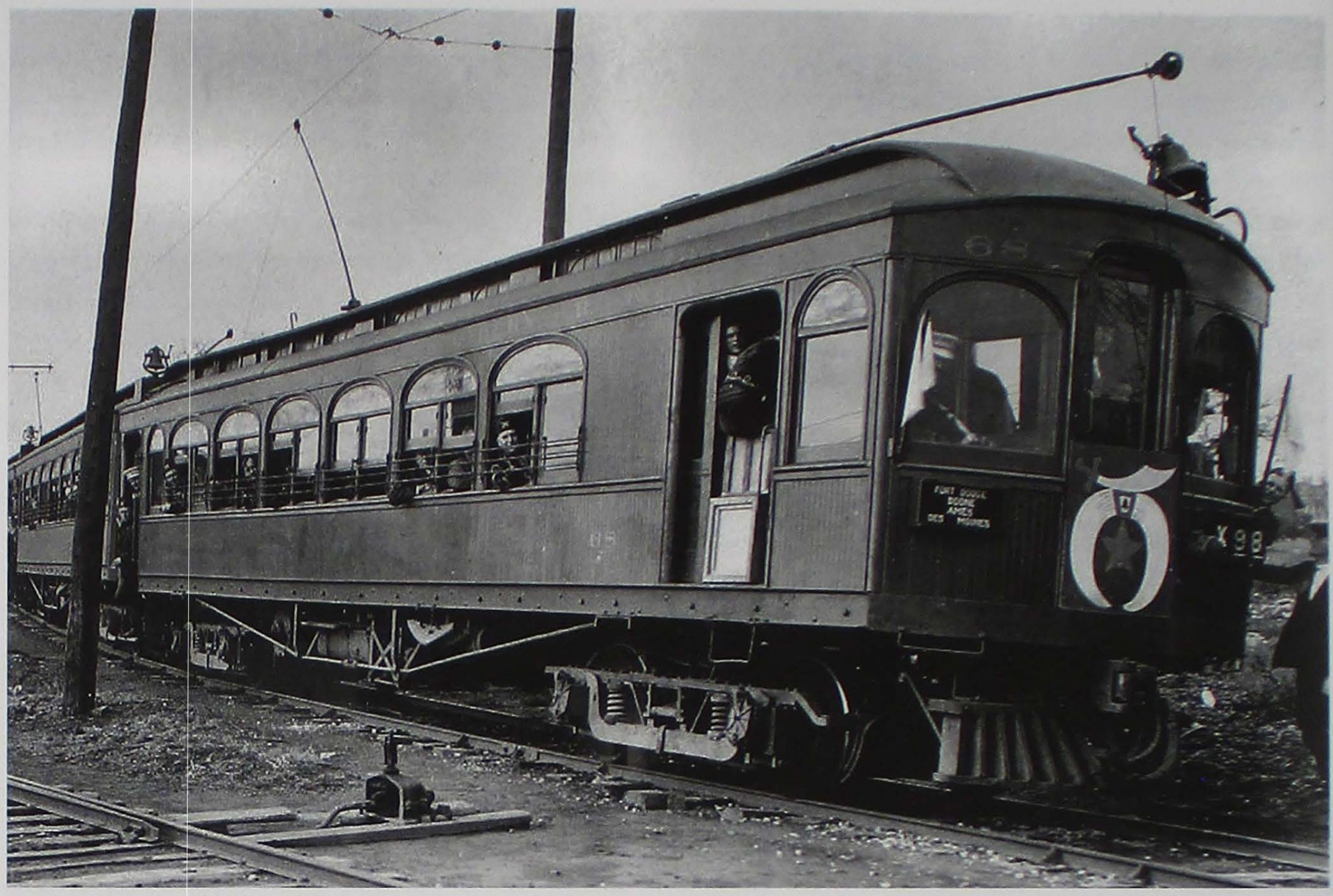
Money flowed also into terminal facilities on both ends of the main line. Since service began in 1907, the large intercity passenger cars had trundled through downtown Fort Dodge on streetcar

tracks to and from the City Park where they were turned on a wye and serviced. But in 1914 the company erected a new facility at the eastern edge of the business center (11th Street), turning cars on a loop track. On the other end of the line, FDL on March 31, 1914, took lease of Des Moines Western, a terminal railway owned by the Hubbell interests, electrified it that summer, added new trackage in 1916 from Swanwood Junction to Dean Avenue and entered Des Moines over the leased Hubbell line to its own freight terminal on Court Avenue near the state capitol building. [14]

That was not the end of major expenditures. Homer Loring long had cast covetous eyes on nearby Crooked Creek Railroad which, after the death of Walter Willson stumbled along on a wobbly path of independence. Even as the first interurban car strutted into Fort Dodge local journalists had confidently declared that FtDDM&S would soon thrust its own line into Lehigh—not divining how that small community might support three railroads. In any event, Loring at the moment had been overextended and FDL soon tipped into receivership, but Loring's gaze was never distracted. Reports had Crooked Creek sold to FtDDM&S on December 1, 1910, and ownership certainly did change, but rather more likely to those close to or friendly to it. Crooked Creek continued on as a separate corporation under its original charter earning very modest operating profit by handling mostly brick and tile (55% of all), grain, and coal (about 20% each). Late in 1913, when Crooked Creek's leaky teakettle locomotive failed, FDL, which by this time was fully electrified but held one 2-6-0 in reserve, sent it to Lehigh. In that same year of 1913, Crooked Creek turned in a net loss of $11,558; two years later it failed to meet interest payments on bonds. On March 16, 1916, FDL's attorney Walter R. Dyer of Boone bid $112,200 and asked the court to assign the property to Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. The court agreed. That part of the former Newton & Northwestern that had been abandoned in place from Colfax to Newton, over 14 miles, now was dismantled and rail relaid on part of former Crooked Creek, and also used for a short stretch of new track from Evanston to Border Plains and Brushy. Construction, rehabilitation and electrification programs would not be hurried. "The advent of the thoroughly equipped interurban, officiated and managed by wide awake railroad men who are at the front of their profession," gushed the *Lehigh Argus*, "means the future of a bigger and more prosperous Lehigh." The first regular car finally arrived on Sunday, October 14, 1917, bearing 51 persons including company officials and many area farmers who availed themselves of the opportunity to "jump the car" and ride a few miles to their neighbors. Passenger service to Lehigh from Fort Dodge was to be offered every two hours in daylight, service to Webster City delayed "owing to difficulty in securing labor and a hitch encountered in work in the Brushy cut" according to the *Fort Dodge Messenger*. The first car bounced into Webster City on November 11. Thereafter Lehigh and Webster City cars met at Evanston Junction allowing passengers equal opportunity to continue on to Fort Dodge, Lehigh, or Webster City. Service was good, demand was great. [15]



Above: Car 62, an American Car Company product, was unique to the Fort Dodge Line. The car always had an arch roof and was noticeably wider than the standard FDL cars. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*



Above: Fort Dodge Line always welcomed the opportunity to accommodate large groups. No. 68 is at the head of a five-car Shriners' special at Boone in 1914. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

Many persons inbound off the Lehigh-Webster City branch no doubt availed themselves of streetcar utility provided by Fort Dodge Street Railway, a wholly-owned subsidiary of FDL, which advertised convenient operation on twenty-minute headways employing heavy double-truck two-man cars until supplanted in 1916 with four four-wheel one-man cars to reduce labor costs. FDL likewise provided streetcars for Ames and the college west of town with thirty-minute headways reduced to twenty minutes in 1912 and to fifteen minutes in 1917 after a loop around the campus was installed. It was a common occurrence for college men to grease rails on the steep southward grade from Boone Street to Maple Street—all of it much to the amusement of students but to acute consternation of crews and management. A curious sidebar to the road's streetcar history came unpredictably in 1909 when elderly car number 10 that had introduced the era at Fort Dodge was utilized in a very homely way to taxi miners from Fraser to and from mines at North Ogden. Said one long-serving employee: "Any time you put the trolley up she was ready to go, and any and all ran her back and forth to the mine." **16**

It was, in all, a glorious time. Nine daily passenger trains zipped up and down the main line, eight more made Des Moines-Ames round trips, six into and out of Webster City and the same for Lehigh, and seven connectors plied each way on the Hope-Rockwell City leg. Some cars, usually new 57-foot all-steel center-entrance types, found assignment on surprising Boone-Ames runs, and could be found on Rockwell City and Webster City-Lehigh jobs. "To accommodate people from Boone and intermediate stations," FDL promised to run special cars from the Iowa State College campus near Ames to Boone after "the close of concerts" on October 29, 1915. It was typical of the company's accommodating nature and it was representative of the tight relationship of the

time between railroads and the broad American public. Teachers used FDL to reach rural schools on the Webster City branch and students piled aboard to oblige themselves of high school opportunity at Fort Dodge or Webster City. Shoppers thronged to Boone and return. Visitors from Rockwell City arrived at Fraser. Johnson & Son advertised "fancy potatoes" on the "Interurban track" at Boone. And a mild commotion reflecting race relations of the day occurred one morning in 1915 on the 7:30 a.m. car to Des Moines "when a colored man refused to move to the smoker and give his seat to ladies." He was forcibly removed, "slightly bruised and shaken." [17]

In 1912, Homer Loring made a trip to Rockwell City, scouted the area surrounding, and concluded that FtDDM&S might increase its cash flow by selling surplus electrical power from its Fraser generating plant. He noted that the road used daylight power mostly for passenger movements, freight during nocturnal hours, with excess capacity unused. By improving load factor and greater volume of output the cost of producing energy could be reduced—increasing corporate revenue. To that end, a puppet—Central Iowa Light & Power (CIL&P)—was created as FtDDM&S emerged from receivership in 1913. It would sell energy, wholesale and retail, to municipalities, grain elevators, gypsum mills, brick and tile works, and other industries. In that way CIL&P (FtDDM&S in reality) came to distribute electricity to light the cities and towns of Ankeny, Cambridge, Farnamville, Fort Dodge, Huxley, Lehigh, Ogden, Pilot Mound and other locations over time. It augured well. At Fort Dodge, the *Messenger* delighted in reporting that FDL's net income for the twelve months ending March 31, 1917 was "more than 2½ times annual interest on First Mortgage bonds outstanding." [18]

There were, of course, bumps and curious incidents along the way. Customers at Napier complained that the depot there was untidy, improperly lighted, "not protected from use by tramps and others who made the place a nuisance," and was in need of a full-time agent. Iowa Board of Railroad Commissioners ordered the company to spruce up the place but denied demands for an agent. A brief strike by electrical workers and linemen in 1917 was atypical, and the dam on the flood-prone Des Moines River at Fraser went out with the ice in the spring of the same year. The overhead needed constant attention and was susceptible to trouble in extremely cold weather when wire contracted and broke and in sleet or electrical storms. Snow plagued the Rockwell City branch and other locations in 1912. Accidents were rare, but they did happen. Five persons were injured and others shaken up in 1907 when a car moving out of Ames for the college hit a Chicago & North Western freight train because the towerman gave each train green signals, and on October 7, 1915, an automobile ran into two-car train number 14 at Story Street in Boone. The only serious disaster came on March 4, 1918 when a passenger train and a freight met head on in fog near Ericson; five persons died, twenty-five injured. [19]

By the time of the awful Ericson wreck, the United States was fully enmeshed in the Great War and one might well have expected that Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern would be affected only at the margins. Not so. It was so thoroughly engrained as part of the national railway web that it became one of the very few electric roads to fall under government control by the United States Railroad Administration, a dubious honor. One curious footnote: during the time of government control FDL made no reports to the Iowa Board of Railroad Commissioners. [20]

Above: Accidents were rare but five persons died and twenty-five were injured when car 68 ran headlong into a freight train near Ericson on March 4, 1918.


66
FORT DODGE
BOONE
DES MOINES

7

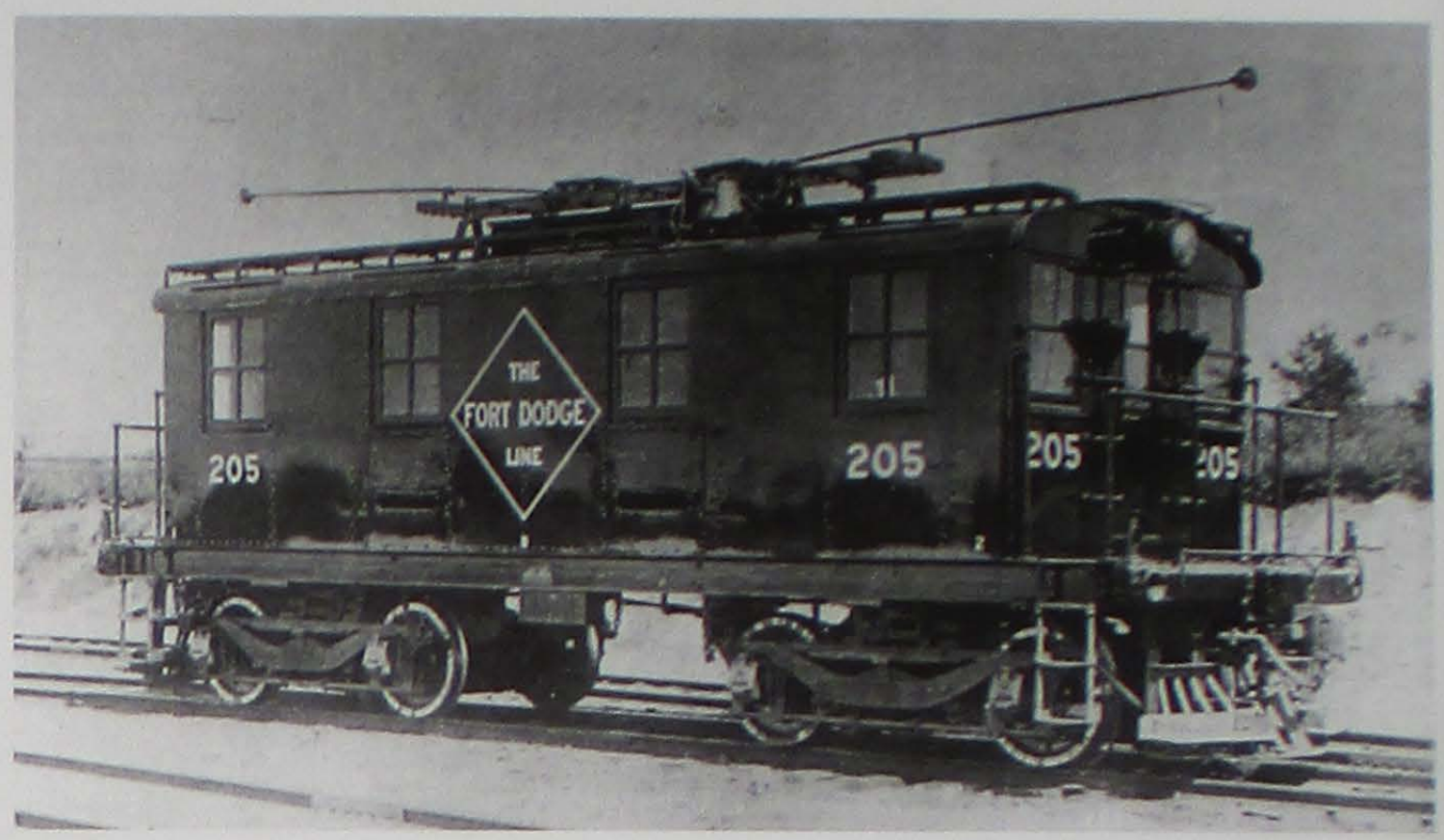
Stellar Performer

Railroad owners and managers in the year 1920 faced a curiously fluid future. The past offered little guidance in forecasting the future. True, railroads had transformed the United States into a mighty industrial and agricultural giant—as if by the mere wave of a magician's wand, as Ralph Waldo Emerson once had observed. Indeed, rails had become, and for the most part they remained, the dynamic force defining American life. They were the glue that bound the nation; their great urban passenger stations seemed as temples where Americans worshipped sacred values—progress, prosperity, success. The nation's population had increased by 68 per cent between 1890 and 1920, but during the same period passenger miles per person leapt by 138 per cent, and ton miles per person skyrocketed by 223 per cent. It all reflected the vibrancy of the American economy and the centrality of rails to that economy. **1**

Yet that centrality was very clearly under assault. Competitive forces—highway, water, and even air-were already chewing at the edges of the carriers' financial pie. Moreover, some roads were overcapitalized compared to traffic potential; other were captive to single industries or commodities or to the vicissitudes of nature. Owners and managers, if not the general public, eventually recognized a truth: the country had too many route miles. This became an even greater burden as modal competition increased, as labor and government regulations stripped management of prerogative, and as owners, managers, labor, and regulators collectively slipped into a counterproductive "this is the way we have always done it" mentality.

The immediate problem for all railroads following the USRA experience was getting control of costs—now 86 per cent greater payrolls and a 16 per cent larger work force than prior to government control. "Before and after" comparisons were stark. In 1914 the nation's Class I (largest) railroads handled 1,817,471,382 tons of freight, expending $1,337,344,135 in wages, posting an enviable 70.39 operating ratio. In 1920, however, railroads moved 2,259,938,278 tons, spent $3,698,216,351 for labor, and shuddered behind a dismal operating ratio of 94.38. Workers understandably were unwilling to give up recently won gains; carriers understandably were adamant about getting control of costs. **2**

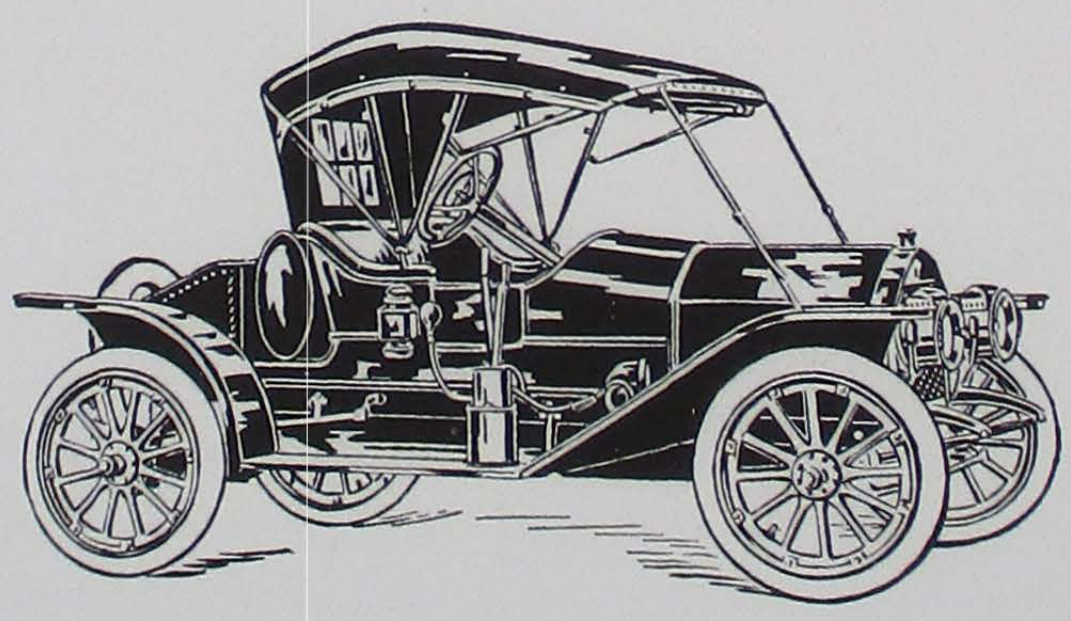
The financial circumstance of Iowa's railroads was, if anything, even more challenging than for the industry at large. Iowa's steam railroads collectively racked up a net deficit of nearly $10 million in 1920. Some roads were more fragile than others; Chicago Great Western and Minneapolis & St. Louis, as examples, in 1920 earned inadequately to cover fixed charges, Chicago & North Western and Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha suffered that trauma in 1921. A year later bonds of railroads around the country amounting to $109 million were in default and most railroad securities were trading lower than before the war. Part of this depressing record was explained by USRA inefficiencies, and part of it could be laid off to a short but severe postwar depression,



Above: The solid boxlike appearance of locomotive 205 implies power and could easily handle any freight assignment. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

but these problems would pale next to fallout from the country's faltering agricultural sector. Spectacularly prosperous years prior to and during the war had unleashed too much expansion, extravagance, and speculation in that critical sector. The bonanza export market disappeared with the end of the Great War, and with it passed Iowa's blazing agricultural economy. The state's farm income crested at nearly $1 billion in 1919, but dropped by a third in 1921. The value of farm land and buildings in Iowa had more than doubled in the 19 teens, but at least a third of that value vanished in the first half of the 1920s. Nationally, wheat prices dropped from about $2.20 per bushel in 1919 to $1.01 in 1921. Swine producers fared no better. The price of hogs peaked at $16.69 phw in 1920, but plummeted to $7.63 in 1921. A startling loss of capital investment, high mortgage rates, rising operating costs, and depressed commodity prices affected farmers nearly everywhere to one extent or another. And the ripple effect was immediate, with fewer ticket sales and freight billings for the state's railroads. [3]

Farmers felt betrayed: in some perverse and ironic way they were falling behind in the midst of plenty. What kind of justice was there, they wondered in a system that penalized success? This short verse sums up their frustration.



Above: The automobile, in the twinkling of an eye, would transform the American landscape, its culture and its economy.

"Oh, the corn is ripe in Iowa
And the freight rates still are high
The taxes, too, are mounting,
While the farmers moan and sigh."

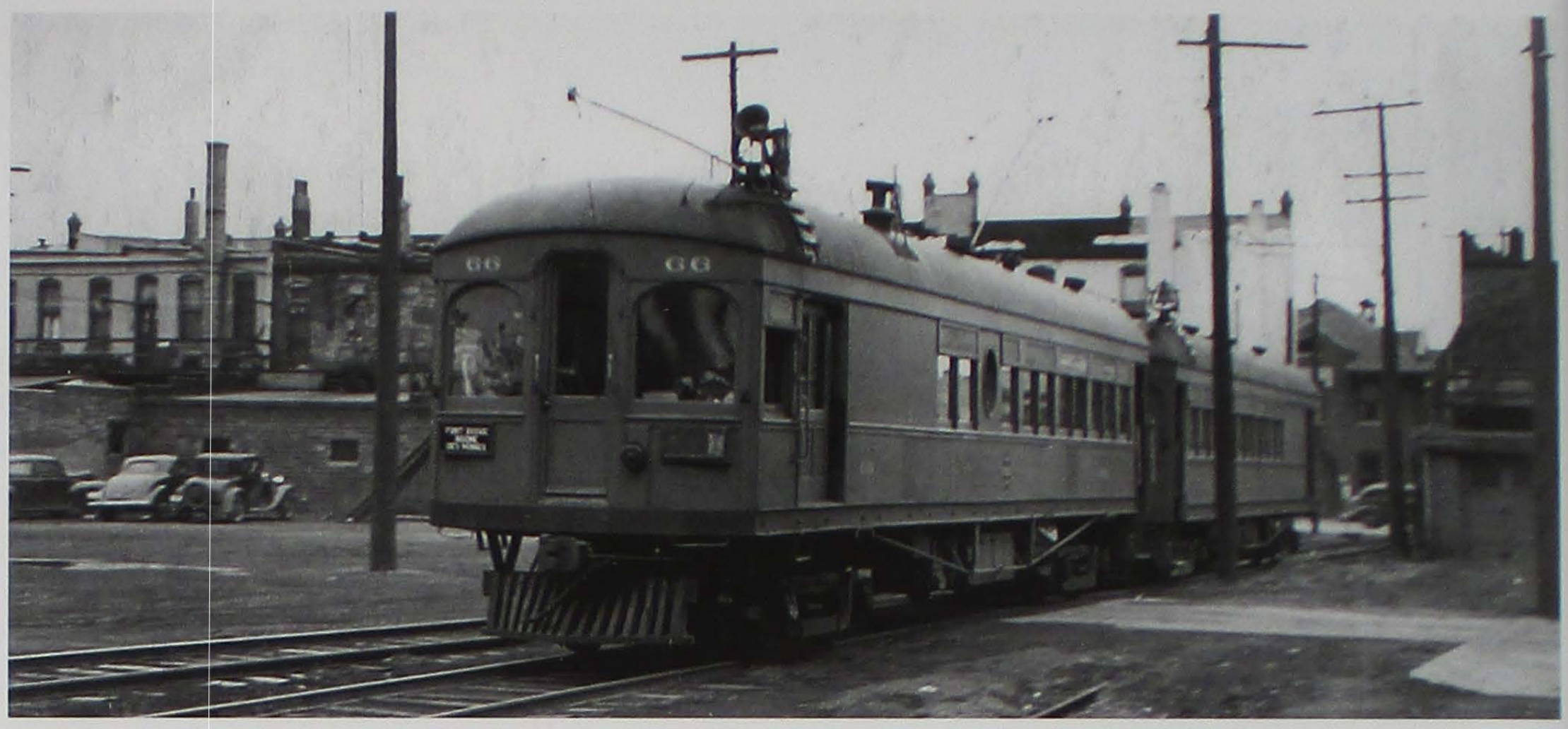
Not surprisingly, farmers sought relief through the political process, including support for the McNary-Haugen bill, but they failed when President Calvin Coolidge vetoed that measure. Farmers had success, however, with the Hoch-Smith Resolution, adopted by Congress in 1925, which directed the ICC to give agricultural commodities the most favorable treatment possible. Railroad managers winced. Rock Island's President J. E. Gorman might have spoken for all when he addressed the "very laudable desire to help the farmer." Said Gorman: "We sympathize with this desire, but no one has yet suggested a way whereby what is lost to the carriers from low rates on farm products can be made up through higher rates on other traffic; yet the alternative is to take money out of the carriers, which already are inadequate. It is a popular cry to keep the farmers, but to do it by destroying the railroads is a poor policy...." [4]

And the spectre of modal competition loomed larger than ever. The Federal Highway Act of 1921 required that states design a system of interstate and intercounty roads for which federal dollars might be made available. Iowa in 1919 already had

Above: Locomotive 107, seen here on May 9, 1937, was one of the first two motors to arrive on FtDDM&S in 1909. These units continued to see use as FDL's freight business assumed greater importance in the '20s and '30s. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

established a 6,500-mile state road system. Ten years later the state had 2,317 miles of paved roads; communities and farmers off the main arteries stayed "in the mud" or supported campaigns to gravel local roadways. The explosion of tax-built public highways was met by an equal or even greater growth of motor vehicles using them. In 1918, one of the most serious problems at the Iowa State Fair was the swarm of automobiles—perhaps 45,000 of them passing through the gates, overflowing available parking spaces. By 1920, 171,595 automobiles were reported on Iowa farms, 407,578 in the entire state. In 1925, Ford Motor Company pumped out 9,000 cars daily, and in 1929 the American automobile industry would produce a record 4.5 million passenger vehicles; registrations nationwide reached 23.1. The place of over-the-road trucking was not yet assured, but in 1925 there were 2.4 million trucks registered across the country, used mostly in local operation. The collective impact was clear. Rock Island in 1924 was forced to admit that "the growing competition of motor vehicles, both passenger and freight, has an adverse effect on our revenues." The same might have been said of all other Iowa roads. [5]

The United States Bureau of Roads estimated that 4,932,000,000 persons were carried by automobile in 1920 compared to 1,284,222,889 paying passengers on the nation's railroads. In 1923, those carriers transported approximately the same number of passengers as they had in 1912, and the Interstate Commerce Commission later found that boardings on Class I roads declined by nearly one-third between 1920 and 1926. This dramatic shrinkage was almost totally in local traffic. In the East, New York Central reported a decrease of 2.24 million passenger miles in 1923 against 1917, and in the heartland, Chicago & North Western lost fully one-half of its local business during the same years. Rock Island reported in 1925 that it was carrying fewer passengers than in 1911. It was much the same at Great Northern which hauled about half as many customers in 1923 compared to 1916. [6]



Above: Two-car passenger trains on the Fort Dodge Line had become a rare sight as the 1930s progressed. Train headed by No. 66 holds down a schedule at Boone. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

These collective forces had an outsized impact on the nation's electric interurban companies which often were dependent on passenger revenue to sustain life. Of course it was the evolution of motor vehicles—automobiles, trucks, and buses—that provided the greatest threat to the well being of the country's railroads. William Howard Taft rode to his presidential inauguration in a carriage; four years later, in 1913, Woodrow Wilson chose an automobile. The switch was more than symbolic. Few understood then that the automobile, in the twinkling of an eye, would transform the American landscape, its culture and its economy. [7]

"The horseless vehicle" had burst upon the western world late in the 19th century. America's love affair with the automobile was immediate. "Potentially...[the automobile's] ... utility is unlimited," said one observer at the turn of the century. After all, he noted, "the automobile solves the problem of a portable power adapted to the needs of personal and commercial transportation without the supplementary inconvenience and expense of oats thrice daily, the limitation of steel tracks and prescribed routes of travel." [8]

Those who purchased motor vehicles became instant members of what quickly became a powerful special interest group demanding better roadways. In 1902, the State of Iowa began to reverse the historic tradition of local control over road construction and maintenance. The first rural concrete pavement in Iowa was poured in 1911, and the first full mile of concrete pavement in the state was laid west of Mason City in 1912. By the end of 1918 it was extended all the way to Clear Lake—Iowa's "first interurban concrete highway." [9]

Railroad managers and owners were perplexed. Doomsayers writing in the very first years of the new century predicted that motor vehicles would one day wipe out the railway, but most managers and investors scoffed at that idea and surely would have agreed with an author writing for *Engineering Magazine* who admitted that the automobile had "a great future," but who predicted that "the automobile, instead of being a menace to the railway, will be a feeder to it." The "horseless carriage," he said, was "for pleasure, but not for business." However, there was clearly reason for concern. "There seems to be no limit on the touring range of the automobile," confessed Chicago Great Western's Samuel M. Felton. Furthermore, just as automobiles were eroding short haul passenger traffic of both steam roads and interurbans, the truck was eating into short haul and less-than-carload freight. "The radius of the motor truck delivery is now well over 30 miles," fretted Felton, and "every mile of improved road the railroads help lay adds to its length and efficiency." And it was so easy to get into the trucking business. [10]

Interurban, companies actually had felt the pinch as early as 1905-1906 and over the next ten years went "through a period of trial and stress" as one observer put it. And, as he continued: "Among the more important" problems "was the automobile, and particularly the much cursed parasitical pest, known as the jitney bus." By 1916, said another analyst, the industry was "under an extremely dark cloud" with much trackage in the hands of receivers. New construction had peaked in 1907 with 1,476 route miles placed in service (ironically FtDDM&S was a participant in that surge), and route miles across the country peaked in 1916 (15,580 miles), but the first abandonment had occurred in 1908. Interurbans typically had a low rate of return on investment, were overcapitalized, had difficulty in servicing debt, had abbreviated route structures (short hauls), and in the aggregate were vulnerable. The overall operating ratio rose from 67 in 1917 to 87 in 1925; nationwide abandonments over the same period totaled 1,534 miles. [11]

The crunch was slower to arrive for most of Iowa's electric railroads. A writer for *Electric Traction* in 1923 contended that "the 'tall corn' state is particularly fortunate in having good management on the electric properties within its borders" and that "progressive spirit and efficiency" of operation was typical "of the Iowa roads." Seven years earlier those same companies had 491.1 miles of line in service and earned net from operation of $1.429 million or $2,909 per route mile. Fort Dodge Line among these was usually a stellar performer and, for that matter, it compared favorably as measured against most national indices. Ticket sales crested in 1921 ($667,450) but slumped in 1924 ($498,794); the average ticket sold in 1921 was 30.9¢, rising to 36.1¢ in 1924. Total passenger revenue in the same period dropped from $682,657 to $515,341. Freight sales averaged $813,105 for the years 1921-1924 and car hire added $640,170 in 1921, $418,854 in 1923. *Electric Traction* asserted that FtDDM&S did "one of the largest freight businesses of any electric railways in the country" and pointed

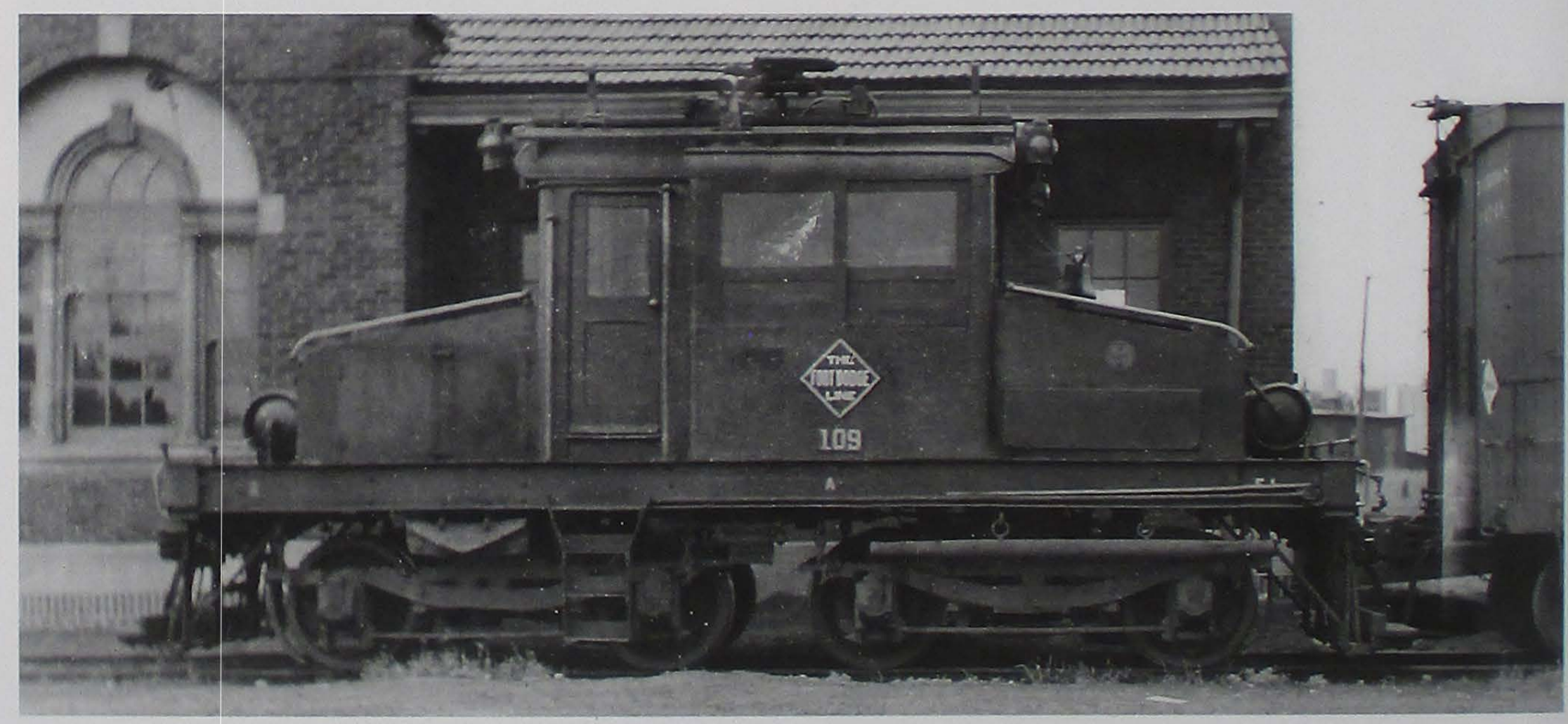
Above: On July 13, 1940, CERA members ventured out to Iowa for an inspection trip over the road using car 62. The high bridge north of Boone was an obligatory photo stop. *George Krambles photo; Norman Carlson collection*

out that its freight car inventory was an astonishing 2,325 pieces of equipment (mostly boxcars). The operating ratio for fiscal 1921 was a thoroughly alarming 98.9 (reflecting the hangover of United State Railroad Administration control) but dropped to a tolerable 77.7 in 1923; debt was serviced and dividends paid throughout. [12]

Major capital expenditures had been made earlier and were few in the early to mid-1920s. In 1923, however, the road authorized a new freight car repair yard at Boone, twenty acres west from Division Street and north from Eleventh Street. The new facility eventually would have ten tracks with capacity for 200 cars and would boast an office, wash room, blacksmith shop, woodworking mill and small structures for nails, paint and oils, plus a castings and wheel yard. The company likewise invested $150,000 for a new brick and concrete car house and yard office at Fort Dodge to replace buildings destroyed by fire. [13]

Fort Dodge Line's officer corps was as spare as it was stable. Clyde H. Crooks served as president and general manager. Born at Carson, Iowa on July 11, 1874, with a common school education, Crooks entered railroad service at Des Moines Union in 1893, moved to Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul as a clerk in 1901, then to Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific as a commercial agent in 1905, and to FtDDM&S as traffic manager in 1907. Promotion to general manager came in 1914, to president in 1920. Old school, plain spoken, the cigar-smoking Crooks was known as a strict disciplinarian but with a sly spark in his eye he was understood by employees to have a heart of gold under his steel exterior. Serving under Crooks in the company's slim officer cadre was Clarence M. Kelly, superintendent; F. M. Johnston, secretary, treasurer, and auditor; Ralph L. Cooper, chief engineer; Walter R. Dyer, general solicitor; and, nine others including the traffic (sales) force. [14]

Ultimate authority, of course, rested with Homer Loring, the Boston banker, a man who seemed to prefer the shadows, eschewing publicity. Born at Newton Center, Massachusetts in 1875, educated in the public schools, Loring grew up in the brokerage business operated by his father in Boston, became an expert in the financial reorganization of large industries, was a director and then chairman of the board at Boston & Maine Railroad, was heavily involved in restructuring the textile industry of New England, and served as president of FtDDM&S until 1920 but remained as its dominant force thereafter. Short in stature with deep red hair and a Van Dyke beard, Loring dressed meticulously, carried himself with dignity and air of authority, boasted a sharp mind, had a firm command of the English language although he was a man of few words. For FDL employees and for other Iowans he came in contact with he seemed cold, aloof, haughty, stand-



Above: Freight paid most of the bills.

offish. But Loring's competence was not questioned and he had an uncanny ability to hire and retain solid people such as Clyde Crooks and his team. Loring was an occasional visitor, especially until 1920, and in the summer of 1914 he rented a pleasant place at Lake Okoboji, commuting from the general office at Boone to Rockwell City on FDL cars, Milwaukee Road beyond. [15]

Below: No. 50 was constructed by FDL for branchline use with its normal assignment running from Hope to Rockwell City. It is shown in 1912 making the connection with the mainline train at Hope. *A.P. Butts photo; Edward H. Meyers collection*

Bottom Left: The car found the going tough as it tried to fulfill its schedule on the Rockwell City branch in this winter view from the same year. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Bottom Right: Boxholm in 1912 was but a fledgling village, but cream cans, barrels, and other items on the platform suggest a handsome volume of less-than-carload billing adequate to keep the company's agent a busy fellow. Car 78 will soon be highballing towards its Des Moines destination. *George Niles collection*


62
62
FORT DODGE
BOONE
DES MOINES
X62

8

The Motor Car Revolution

There was a distinctive quality to the interurban, indeed a mystique—stopping as it did almost anywhere, an informality, the uniformed brass-buttoned conductor punching tickets or collecting fares and chatting all the while with passengers, the conductor's signal cord suspended from the ceiling flipping back and forth with the rhythm of the car, the air compressor beneath the car cutting in with its businesslike but harmonious and pulsating lung-a-lung-a-lung phonics, the screaming of traction motors and gears as the car got underway, the muffled creaking of the car's woodwork, the hissing sound from the overhead wire, dust clouds rising from the right-of-way, and trackside vegetation bending willingly aside with passage of the electrified meteor.

The motor car, too, had a mystique. Indeed. But its mystique was overpowering. The first gasoline-powered automobile built in the United States, a contraption of Charles and Frank Duryea, Massachusetts bicycle and toolmakers, appeared in September 1892. William Morrison of Des Moines unveiled his electric auto in the same month. Henry Ford had developed his gasoline engine in 1894, his automobile in 1896. The boxlike Model T—the "universal car," "flivver," or "tin lizzie"—was introduced on October 1, 1908. It was, said Ford, an engine of democracy, a popular automobile at a popular price—$950 in 1910, but down to $290 by 1924, and in the next year Ford Motor Company would churn out nine thousand of them per day, one every ten seconds. And Ford was not the only producer. By 1920 it would be joined by Willys-Overland, Chevrolet, Studebaker, Maxwell, Dodge, Packard, and Pierce-Arrow among many others to spew out vehicles that gave owners unfettered adaptability, convenience, and promised, as one observer phrased it, obedience "to the needs or whims of the owner and goes when and where he will." [1]

Right: Alfred P. Butts personified this at FtDDM&S. Time to go--he tugs on the signal cord.

THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE

Above: Arrival of the first motor vehicle in a community set off a cascade interest and curiosity. What did it portend?

The explosive burst of the motor car on the local scene was manifest all around. When President William Howard Taft paused briefly at Fort Dodge on September 28, 1911 as part of his lengthy tour of the country he was given "a whirl of approbation" which included an "automobiles only" parade consisting of 20 to 25 machines—"a pretty sight" boasted the *Messenger*. The revolution was well begun. Local dealers offered 34-horsepower Ramblers with magnito, lamps, and tools for $1800; Everite 30 Touring Car ("The motor has 156 fewer parts than the nearest competition") for $1350; "Fully equipped" Reos for $1132; Hudson "33" ("See the Triangle on the radiator") for $1600; or, Brusn Runabout ("Every-man's car"—"low enough in price to be within the reach of everyone"—"economy, utility"). At Boone, H. C. Payne suggested the "Studebaker Standard Six Brougham" for $1465, but Erickson Motors countered with the Essex Coach for only $895. In 1916, Iowa registered 147,000 automobiles; one source claimed that put the state in third place among the other 47. A serious problem was reported in 1918 when the State Fair was swamped 45,000 autos, taking every available parking space and overflowing into nearby woods and campgrounds. [2]

Public officials predictably were under increased pressure to improve urban streets and rural roadways as the number of vehicles escalated. There was no questioning the poor quality of Iowa farm roads in spring or in any rainy season—utter quagmires. In 1902, the State of Iowa began to reverse its historic tradition of local control over roadway construction and maintenance. Eleven years later the Lincoln Highway became the first coast-to-coast thoroughfare. Boone, on October 31, 1913, would be one of many communities to celebrate completion of "that great natural thoroughfare dedicated to the nation's most honored president." Indeed, the *Boone News-Republican* showed much more enthusiasm for the Lincoln Highway project than for anything surrounding Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern which, ironically, had just emerged from receivership and, be it recalled, was headquartered at Boone. Federal aid initiating federal-state cooperation for highway construction came with the Federal Road Act of 1916. Iowa's General Assembly then designated a hard-surface road system of 2,000 to 6,000 miles, equitably divided among the state's 99 counties. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921 augmented the 1916 act and more came later. [3]

Form 0388 6-8-26—5M— HENNINGER PTG. CO., FT. DODGE, IA.

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern R. R. Co.

AGENT'S DAILY CASH STATEMENT

Lanyon Station, for 11-12 1926

Balance from Previous Day $ 60

RECEIPTS

Freight:		
Current - - -	$	
Previous - - -		
Prepaid Forwarded - -		
Miscellaneous:		
Switching - - -	$	
Demurrage, Storage, etc.		
Sundry Collections - -		
Drafts on Treasurer -		
Tickets:		
Local - - - -	$	
Coupon - - -		
Storage and Ex. Baggage		-
Total Receipts for Day -	$	00
TOTAL -	$	00

DISBURSEMENTS

Advances Forwarded -	$	
P. P. to Connecting Lines		
Overcharge Refunds -		
Station Claims - -		
Miscellaneous:		
Govt. B-L and Others -	$	
Switching Orders -		
Remittances - - -		
Total Disbursement for Day -	$	
CASH ON HAND -	$	00

Dated 11-13 1926 J. M. Dent Agent.

This form to be made up DAILY from CASH BOOK and mailed to Auditor.

Above: Truckers operated over roads provided by governmental entities at all levels and, compared to railways, very often offered greater speed of delivery, more flexible services, and lower rates. All of it was reflected quickly at stations such as Lanyon where the agent on November 12, 1926 reported no receipts of any kind for that day. It happened all too often.

Those same improved vehicular thoroughfares pleased not only autoists but truckers as well. "Fort Dodge is rapidly becoming an auto truck city," bellowed the *Messenger* on November 11, 1913. "One large truck can do more in one hour than a team of horses can do in a day," it asserted, and "the expense is a great deal lighter."

A LOOK AHEAD
Coaching in the Horseless Age

Above: Would the internal combustion engine change the face of "coaching"? A cartoonist in 1904 thought so, but the motor coach did not take the form he projected.

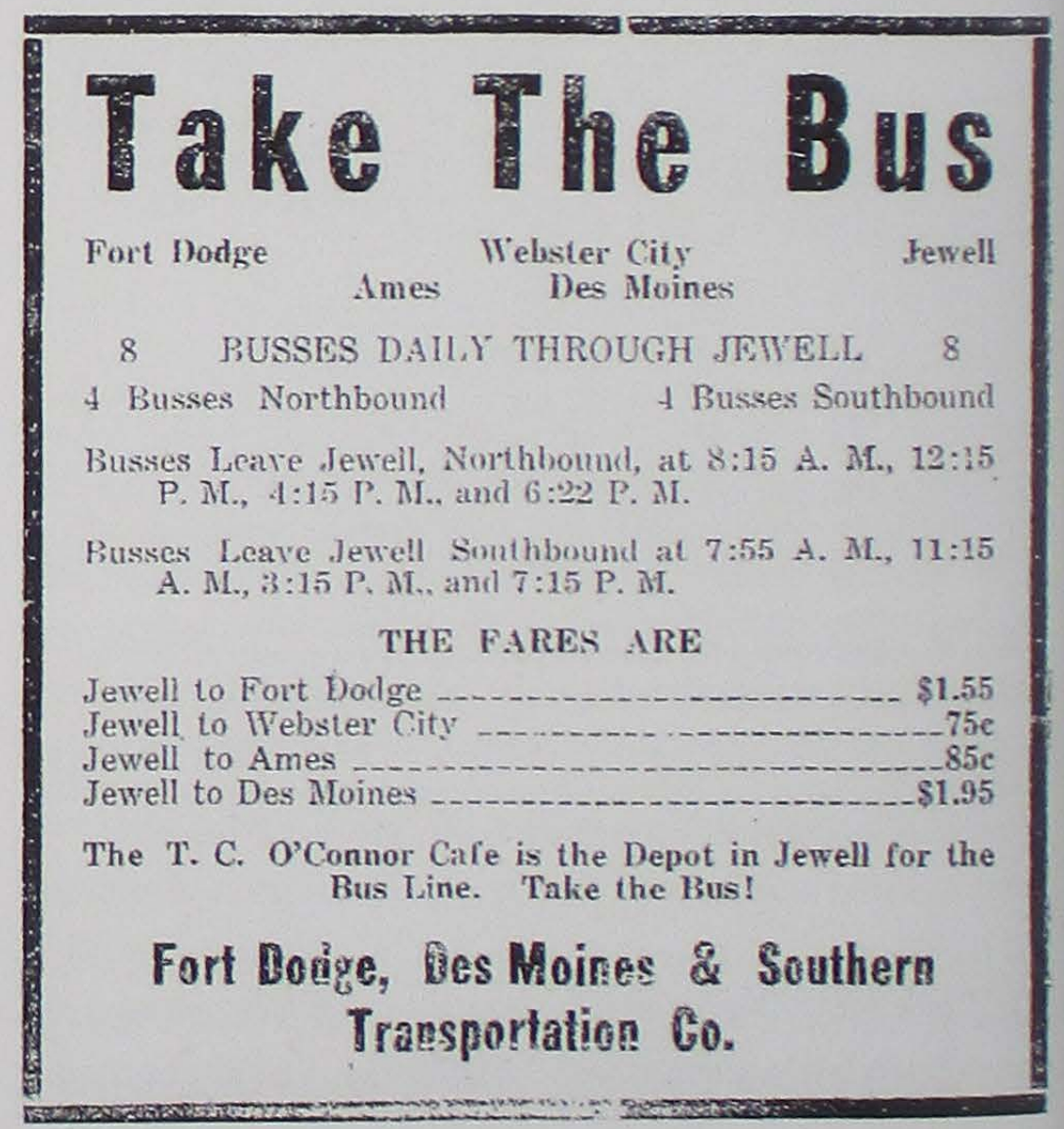
The local International Harvester dealer offered trucks with load capacities ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 pounds. By 1920 there could be no doubt that the motor truck had inaugurated a new era in freight transport. In that year trucks carried more tonnage than either inland waterways or the country's electrified railways, and trucks made major inroads into the freight business of steam roads—especially in short hauls, offering greater speed, more flexible service, and lower rates. And truckers, operating over roads provided by governmental entities at all levels, found profit in their enterprise. Nationwide rail ton miles were nearly constant in the 1920s just as truck registrations skyrocketed. [4]

Railroad managers were slow to recognize the threat of motor vehicles to their near modal monopoly, but as early as 1903 some observers predicted that automobiles alone would, as one said, "wipe out the railway." Nonsense, responded another student of the issue, "the automobile, instead of being a menace to the railway, will be a feeder to it." Neither of them got it right. Still another analyst chipped in: "The train is a service. The motor car is a servant." As it developed, rail passenger volume peaked in 1920 and then turned downward. Among area steam roads that trend for Chicago, 'Milwaukee & St. Paul, for Minneapolis & St. Louis, and for Chicago Great Western had begun already in 1916. "The growing competition of motor vehicles, both passenger and freight," Rock Island blithely reported in 1924, "has for the present an adverse effect on our revenue." In the next year Rock

Above: Car 62 stops at Boone on its southbound trip to Des Moines on September 24, 1939. *John F. Humiston photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Island was more direct: "The continued decline in passenger business...is due almost entirely to the competition of the motor vehicle." It was the same dreary story for every railroad company serving the state of Iowa. [5]

The "jitney" or "jitney cab" was the bastard offspring of the motor car and the motor truck—vehicles rejiggered to haul one or even a few passengers on an ad hoc or free-lance basis. Public authorities at first had no idea what to make of them and their owner operators. They did offer a service but were they in the public interest? It was not clear. Initially found only in urban areas and not authorized by nor bound by franchise, they were nothing less than irritating vermin as far as streetcar firms were concerned—stealing fares, they vigorously complained, and trimming profits. This certainly was the case at Fort Dodge and at Des Moines where city fathers finally licensed jitneys at $25 a year plus $5000 bond. The competitive instincts of jitney operators



Take The Bus

Fort Dodge Webster City Jewell
Ames Des Moines

8 BUSSES DAILY THROUGH JEWELL 8
4 Busses Northbound 4 Busses Southbound

Busses Leave Jewell, Northbound, at 8:15 A. M., 12:15 P. M., 4:15 P. M., and 6:22 P. M.

Busses Leave Jewell Southbound at 7:55 A. M., 11:15 A. M., 3:15 P. M., and 7:15 P. M.

THE FARES ARE

Jewell to Fort Dodge $1.55
Jewell to Webster City 75c
Jewell to Ames 85c
Jewell to Des Moines $1.95

The T. C. O'Connor Cafe is the Depot in Jewell for the Bus Line. Take the Bus!

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Transportation Co.

Above: "Take the Bus" urged Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Transportation Company--in this case from Jewell, a place not served by parent Fort Dodge Line, but along the bus route serving Fort Dodge, Webster City, and Des Moines.

eventually led them to plan routes linking one community to another—especially after the Great War ended in 1918. That provoked Iowa legislators to expand authority of the Railroad Commission to cover motor buses and then motor trucks. Some intercity bus routes were designed to serve communities not located on rail lines but more often they were explicitly designed to lure customers from both steam and electrified railways by providing frequent schedules, downtown terminals, convenient intermediate stops, and low fares. Railroad owners and managers cried foul, and Iowa's Railroad Commission agreed. In 1924, when an assortment of applicants sought permission to institute motor carrier passenger operations in Fort Dodge Line's service area—Des Moines-Fort Dodge, Des Moines-Boone, Des Moines-Ames-Commissioners ruled in all cases that FtDDM&S (and others) already provided an abundance of service. Every request denied. [6]

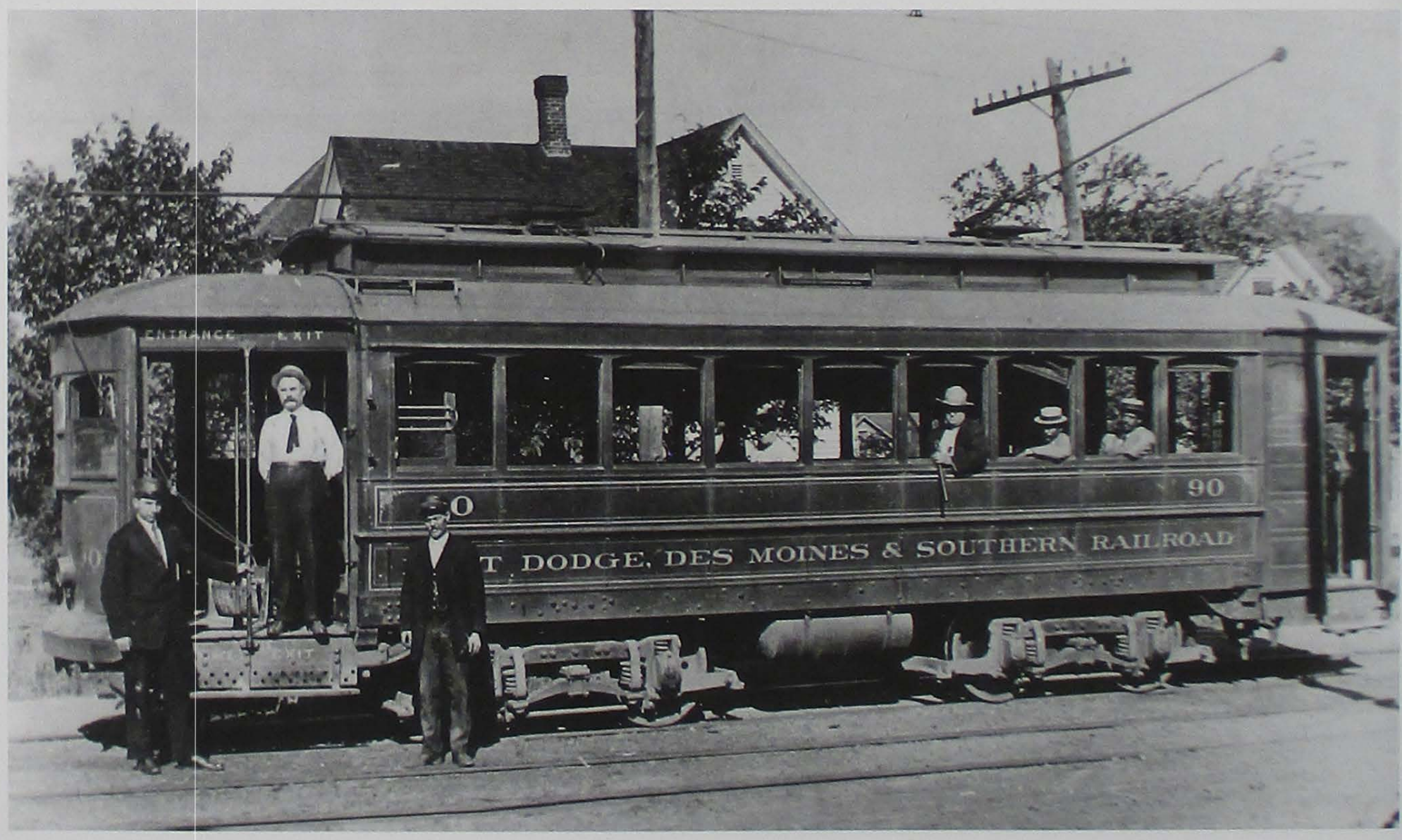
Homer Loring pondered all of this. The day of the jitney may have passed, or at least was passing, but as one advocate stated: "The bus business, we are sure, is going to stay and will show remarkable progress during the next few years." Indeed by 1926, some 35,000 "auto buses" would be employed nationwide in common carrier use, mostly on short haul schedules, but some of them were engaged in through service to connect cities. Late in 1925, a top executive at Chicago, Burlington & Quincy told the Interstate Commerce Commission that "the motor vehicle as a factor in transportation will stay until superseded by the airplane or something like it, and the only recourse for railroads is to adopt it and work it into existing lines," adding that his company was "trying an experiment with twelve motor cars on [subsidiary] Colorado & Southern." CB&Q was not the first nor the only road to undertake such an experiment. By 1928, steam railroads or their surrogates would operate more than 1,000 motor coaches

Above: "The Good Old Days" were disappearing across the country.

over some 10,000 route miles. Interurbans, too, would embrace that experiment. Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern would be one of them. [7]

Homer Loring unblinkingly embraced a "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" position—this despite the fact that the Iowa Railroad Commission to date certainly had defended FtDDM&S against wildcat bus candidates. He studied the endless stream of data supplied him by Clyde Crooks from Boone. Car miles had remained nearly constant (1,226,046 in fiscal 1921, 1,238,432 in fiscal 1925); average fares per customer had remained essentially the same (30.9¢ in fiscal 1921, 29.1¢ in fiscal 1925); but ticket sales had slumped badly ($667,450 for fiscal 1921, $423,034 for fiscal 1925). Loring ultimately concluded that the best defense was a good offense, saying; "The traveling public would rather ride on rubber than rails." Thus in 1925 was established Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Transportation Company-"The Wild Rose Route"—capitalized at $50,000 for the purpose of creating and operating "bus transportation through the same territory served by the electric lines" with Clyde Crooks as president. Iowa Railroad Commissioners quickly authorized predictable bus routes, Boone-Webster City, Boone-Des Moines, Ames-Des

Above: Expenses exceeded income at Fort Dodge Street Railway with the parent company forced to swallow the loss. Loring and Crooks threw in the towel.



Above: Streetcar service ended at Fort Dodge when the final "Owl" car tied up on November 14, 1925.

Above: Single-truck city car 94 was the only St. Louis Car Company product to run in Fort Dodge. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Moines, and eventually Boone-Fort Dodge, Harcourt-Rockwell City, and Ames-Fort Dodge. Commissioners also, and rather surprisingly, approved routes beyond FtDDM&S interurban territory—Fort Dodge-Algona and Fort Dodge-Spencer. One contemporary account had passengers flowing to "the buses like bees to a clover field and they were loaded to capacity [seventeen seats] each trip." Then, in 1927, Fort Dodge., Des Moines & Southern Transportation purchased Hawkeye Stages, and in that way became "the largest single bus company of its kind in the state [of Iowa] "with 444 route miles, 30 buses, rolling 125,000 miles per month. Later routes included Des Moines-Indianola, Ames-Waterloo, Des Moines-Pella, Des Moines-Knoxville, and Ottumwa-Oskaloosa. Other Iowa interurbans—Cedar Rapids & Iowa City; Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern; Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine; Des Moines & Central Iowa; and even tiny Tama & Toledo—likewise developed bus operations. [8]

Jitneys and motor cars predictably had deleterious impact on streetcar profits just as they frustrated intercity service. Nervousness among streetcar investors and managers was evident across the country as early as 1911 when in chorus they moaned of "decreasing returns due to burdens of taxes, street improvements, unreasonable regulations," and, of course, modal competition. "An idea seems to have grown up in most communities that an electric street railway is a natural and proper prey for any and all kinds of demands, whether just or unjust," complained the president of the American Electric Railway Association. It certainly was true that public attitudes had changed abruptly from full embrace of the streetcar to invidious comparison with motor vehicle options. By 1915, there were 450 American factories churning out a steady stream of increasingly low cost pleasure and commercial motor cars. Streets were clogged with them. The public grew impatient with halting streetcars ever so crowded with strap hangers, gathering and depositing customers in the middle of streets, tying up traffic, and not serving every nook and cranny of the community. All of it was reflected to one extent or another at both Ames and Fort Dodge. [9]

At Ames, FtDDM&S in 1923 used one-man cars on ten minute intervals, two years later dropping fares to only seven cents and adding newly acquired buses to the service mix. Several cars were damaged on September 3, 1928, in a wreck, and already cars were not operated in the evening and not at all on Sundays. The end was near, but came haltingly in 1929 with streetcar tracks removed in August 1930. [10]

The end had come even earlier for Fort Dodge Street Railway. Rumblings had been heard in 1919 but it was not until the fall of 1925 that rumors had a bus company formed independent of FtDDM&S and its street railway and that FDL wanted out of the

streetcar franchise. Indeed, on October 30, the new bus company, Fort Dodge Transportation Company, deployed a six-bus fleet over seven routes in direct competition with what the *Messenger* called "veteran jitney buses", and, of course, Fort Dodge Street Railway. Loring and Crooks threw in the towel, admitting that streetcars had failed to meet expenses in 1921, 1922, and 1924, and that over the period 1920-1925 (nine months of 1925) had experienced operating losses of $7,871.71. The last "Owl" car was scheduled to leave the Illinois Central station at 11:30 p.m. on November 14, clanged along Central Avenue bearing only "a late bound couple or two from the dance or a movie," and then "was put to rest in the car barn." The *Messenger* shrugged. "Fort Dodge, as a whole," it said, "has been little concerned." In fact, the *Messenger* editorialized, "other cities had demonstrated that gasoline driven vehicles traveling on rubber tires were logical successors to trolley cars." Now, it continued, "clean and shiny" new buses "moving swiftly, smoothly, and frequently along the streets" were the city's "most metropolitan sights." It was true, of course, that streetcar ridership across the country had peaked earlier. Meanwhile bus technology had made great strides. In 1922, Fageol Brothers turned out the first true bus—not one simply thrown onto a truck chassis. Soon thereafter companies such as Fageol Safety Coach, Twin, Coach, White, Flexible, Reo, Pierce-Arrow, Studebaker, Dodge, and Yellow Coach produced hundreds of buses each year. In Iowa, streetcars disappeared not only at Ames and Fort Dodge but also at Keokuk (1928), Fort Madison (1930), Dubuque (1932), and Mason City (1936). [11]

Above: Interior of Fort Dodge city car 94 is shown in this builder's photo. *Norman Carlson collection*

FtDDM&S, fortunately, had sources of income outside of railroad operation itself. The company in 1928 told Iowa's Railroad Commissioners "that due to decreased passenger traffic and curtailment of revenue on its rail line, the main source of revenue at the present time is from the sale of electrical energy." That assertion was wide of the mark, but over the period 1922-1927 the company posted net profit of $163,537 per year from "auxiliary" sources. In fiscal 1925 it showed $615,588 as investment and addition for power, and in 1929 it expanded line service in Boone, Polk, Story, and Webster counties. Additional income came from

car rents—$527,492 in 1925 but falling dramatically to $125,181 in 1929. Its freight car inventory in mid-1928 included 1,921 pieces of revenue equipment, primarily 60,000-pound-capacity boxcars, but also 20 stock cars, 107 gondolas, and 8 insulated boxcars. [12]

Demand for freight carriage, happy to say, remained strong with the usual traffic mix. Plaster products and brick and tile moved in heavy tonnage to reflect national demand for building materials; grain moved according to harvest season and marketing conditions; billings of farm implements to local dealers was slack—a mirrored image of the ongoing agricultural recession of the 1920s. Coal still flowed from mines at North Ogden but more came from off-line sources, some from Des Moines & Central Iowa stations and interchanged to FDL for delivery. Clay moved to tile works and gypsum rock, on occasion, was shipped to Dewey Cement at Linwood, near Davenport, via Huxley and Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific. One industry leader at the time forcefully advocated a comprehensive program to make traction companies attractive to the shipping public—active traffic solicitors, joint tariffs, fair rates, good service, and "a distinctly personal class of service." Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, with on-line salesmen at Boone, Des Moines, and Fort Dodge along with two energetic agents at traffic-rich Chicago, clearly personified this upbeat type of program. Freight earnings reflected as much: $872,888 in 1925, $1,105,010 in 1929. [13]

The *Boone News-Republican* reported without so much as a hint of irony that FtDDM&S was delivering automobiles in gondola cars to local dealers. Neither was there a hint of irony but only high-voltage civic pride and positive expectation at Rockwell City in October 1925 when contracts were let in Calhoun County for grading and graveling of seven-and-one-half miles of secondary roads. Calhoun County already that year had graveled over sixty-five miles of road. It mirrored a broader pattern of the ever expanding motor vehicle revolution. In Fort Dodge, the *Messenger* was filled with advertisements for Willard batteries,

Above: Fort Dodge Line combine 74 on southbound train No. 2 makes an early morning transfer of express to a Railway Express truck. Scene at Boone, late 1930s. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

Northland oil, Cities Service and Red Crown gasoline and, not incidentally, the Portland Cement Association. Still another ad advised locals that an International Harvester Speed Truck was available for only $1,085. Improved roadways, inexpensive fuel, and low entry costs clearly implied that an increased number of eager entrepreneurs would enter the trucking field and expand the reach of modal competition. Railroad companies already had seen considerable shrinkage in their less-than-carload business (Class I steam railroads in 1920 handled 89,901,495 tons of LCL freight, only 68,296,686 tons in 1926, a decline of 24.03 per cent), and one railroad president, L. W. Baldwin of Missouri Pacific, said that such "losses to railroads by motor competition are permanent." This had happened, he said bluntly, by "continued building of hard roads, in many instances paralleling the lines of [rail] carriers..." By 1928, more than three million motor trucks were in use across the United States, falling generally into three categories: common carrier, contract carrier, or owner-operator. None of these had as yet carved into long haul carload tonnage. Not yet. [14]

These same gravel and hard top roads provided an unalloyed allure to the burgeoning body of motorists (in 1928, more Americans had automobiles than had telephones) and they by now provided unalloyed alarm for the country's railroad companies, their owners, managers, and employees. As Sinclair Lewis observed in *Babbitt*, his popular novel of 1922, the automobile no longer was seen as a luxury, but as a necessity by the American middle class. In Iowa, the number of automobile registrations rose from 407,578 in 1920 to 672,447 in 1928. And even into 1929 there was an exceptional demand for new cars and trucks. In 1928, the nation's rail carriers handled the approximate number of passengers that they had in 1906. Said *Railway Age*: "Practically the only reason for the loss of passenger traffic was the private automobile and the motor coach." The age of railways, was in fact, slipping away, replaced as the number one engine of the domestic economy by the Detroit-Pittsburgh axis. [15]

Every one of these collective variables was evident close at hand. Iowa voters in 1928 approved a $100 million road bond issue to provide a network of paved highways connecting every one of the state's county seat communities. Ford dealerships were swamped by customers after the Model A was introduced late in 1927. At Fort Dodge Flaherty Motors (open evenings) offered Graham Paige Five-Passenger Sedans at $875; Johnson-Laurence featured Studebaker's Erskine-Six—"Smart style and brilliant

Above: Buses of subsidiary Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Transportation Company stood astride the parent company's main track in front of the general office building/depot at Boone. The symbolism was acutely ironic.

performance"—for $860; and, Iowa Motor urged a Pontiac Coupe or Roadster at $745—General Motors Time Payment Plan available. By 1928, 10,341 automobiles were registered in Webster County alone. And to advance Republican prospects in the forthcoming presidential contest the Hoover-Curtis team dispatched a campaign bus that stopped briefly in Fort Dodge at the Wahkonsa Hotel. It oozed modernity. [16]

None of this put a smile on the faces of owners, managers, and employees at Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. For them, *Excess Baggage* and *The Road to Ruin*, movies playing at Fort Dodge theaters in September 1928, seemed cruelly ironic. Ticket sales were down to $162,769 in 1928. Parlor car revenue, $896 in 1926, was a token $53 in 1928 when that service ended. The road earned a tiny net profit from passenger operations in 1928 but the trajectory was anything but encouraging. Homer Loring's steely eyes scrutinized the dreary statistics that flowed to his Boston office from Boone, concluding, according to one report, that "The branch lines are not making enough to pay for axle grease, much less the salary of the crews, so there is nothing left to do except discontinue the service." The Hope-Rockwell City leg was the first to go on August 26, 1926, buses in substitution. The company then sought to eliminate passenger operation to Lehigh and Webster City, telling the Iowa Railroad Commission on September 14, 1927, that it wished to discontinue its four daily trips in each direction, providing buses instead, but the matter became contentious after the company abruptly pulled the cars on June 9, 1928. At a subsequent hearing FtDDM&S showed that daily passenger revenue from the Webster City-Lehigh operation had plummeted from $155.51 in 1920 to a paltry $37.24 in 1924 and that current daily wages for train crews amounted to $26.72 and that said nothing as to cost of electricity and general maintenance. Commissioners predictably ruled that "there is not a great need for continued rail line passenger service." Curiously there was less fuss over the Ames operation where service likewise ended in 1928.

The circumstances on the main line were more complex. Demand there remained heavy at times, traffic to Camp Riviera (the amusement park between Boone and the high bridge) on occasion was so great that conductors ordered the cars to stop short of destination so that all tickets could be collected, but the overall trend was decidedly downward. Since 1925 buses had run at alternate hours with interurban cars on the Boone-Des Moines segment. Later bus schedules included through runs between Fort Dodge and Des Moines and late in 1928 FtDDM&S admitted that "the buses...are usurping much of the passenger trade which formerly went to the electric cars." Consequently a reduction to four round trips daily on the main line commenced on November 4, 1928. Coincidentally, Chicago Great Western removed two "motor trains" on its Fort Dodge-Mason City leg effective November 11, 1928. It was part of a nationwide wave, as that company said: "The passenger business...has been on a downhill grade for the past five years, with each year finding more persons deserting the train for the automobile." [17]

If ever fortune seemed to smile on the United States it was on March 4, 1929, the day Chief Justice William Howard Taft administered the presidential oath of office to Herbert Clark Hoover.

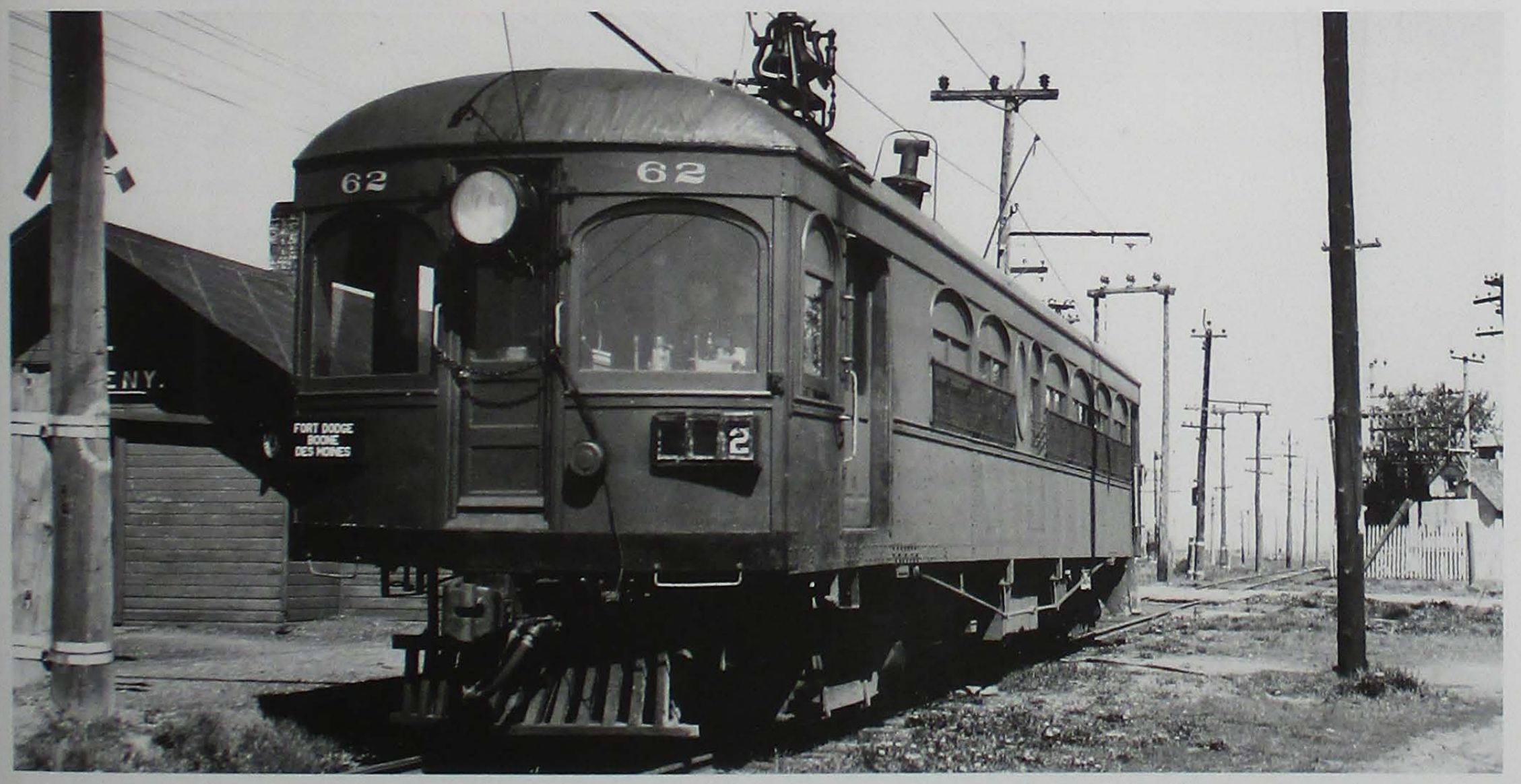
To be sure, on that sunny day in Washington, D.C. there appeared no war clouds on the world's horizon, the domestic economy seemed strong, and American wealth was actively expanding overseas. Hoover, "The Great Engineer," born to poverty only to become legitimately wealthy, owned a well-deserved international reputation as a humanitarian, had served a Secretary of Commerce throughout the "Prosperity Decade" of the 1920s, and had been overwhelmingly elected on a popular platform that promised "a chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage." Every indicator seemed positive. It proved an illusion—an ugly illusion. On Thursday, October 24, 1929, sell orders on the New York Stock Exchange exceeded the ability to sell. Within two weeks the value of listed stocks fell by forty per cent; the Dow-Jones Index plummeted. America slipped inexorably into the Great Depression. [18]


82
82
FORT DODGE
BOONE
DES MOINES

9

"The Dirty Thirties"

The calamitous stock market crash of October 1929 came as a prelude to the Great Depression when industrial production plummeted, when unemployment rose dramatically, and when consumer demand slumped badly. Domestic manufacturing in 1932 was half of what it had been in 1929. Sales of motor vehicles in 1929 hit 4.6 million; the figure in 1933 was a mere 1.3 million. American Locomotive Company had erected an average of 600 locomotives annually during the 1920s; in 1932 it sold but one. Housing starts slid from 509,000 in 1929 to only 93,000 in 1933. Business failures as early as 1930 were epidemic; unemployment in the non-agricultural sector eventually reached 25 per cent, maybe higher, and reductions in income were customary for those remaining on the payroll. Bank suspensions—9,765 around the country in the five-year period 1929-1933—deepened the national malaise. Iowa was not spared; 442 of the state's 1,252 banks closed during the first five years of the 1930s. **1**



Above: Fort Dodge Line No. 62 holds down the early morning southbound schedule as it pauses at Ankeny, 30 minutes from its downtown Des Moines destination. Scene from May 1937. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: Railroaders argued that they were obliged to perform on an uneven playing field.

The depression in industry and commerce was quickly manifest in agriculture, already smarting after a decade of trauma. Exports of grain and meat fell off due to shrunken demand abroad in conjunction with counterproductive tariffs; domestic consumption fell, too, the result of inadequate buying power and changed dietary customs. Gross farm income nationwide in 1932 was but 40 per cent of what it had been in 1929. Land values slid uncontrollably; market value of an average acre of farmland in 1932 was about half of what it had been just three years earlier. The ripple effect was immediate. In Iowa, 45 per cent of the state's farmland carried over a billion dollars in debt and 37 per cent of farm land taxes were delinquent. Commodity prices provided an accurate barometer. A farmer from near Kanawha, by way of example, took 50 bushels of shelled corn to town where he tried to sell it for $5.00, but there were no takers, and that evening he returned home with his corn—unable to secure even .109 a bushel. Livestock producers fared no better! [2]

Railroaders were as startled as others by the stock market crash and the depression that followed. Late in November 1929, *Railway Age* editorialized that "the fundamental economic conditions of the country have changed but little," suggesting that "a mild recession in business" had been brewing since late summer. Illinois Central's L. A. Downs two months later admitted that "the recession of [late] 1929" had carried into 1930, but believed that a "recovery seemed definitely under way." President Herbert Hoover argued that "any lack of confidence in the economic future or the basic strength of business in the United States" was foolish, and he extracted from railroad leaders a unanimous determination to "co-operate in the maintenance of employment and business progress"; he also gained promises to "proceed with full programs of construction and betterment" undeterred by nervousness or uncertainty. They could not know, of course, just how serious matters would become or how long the business decline would last. Ralph Budd, in reporting to GN shareholders early in 1931 merely noted that "the smaller volume of traffic handled by Great Northern reflects the decline in all lines of business." Candor was in greater supply at Milwaukee Road: "The world-wide industrial depression... which continued through 1930 with increased severity reduced sharply the volume of business and revenues of your company in common with other railroads and industries." American railroads in 1932 handled 646 million tons, earning $2,451 million; in 1929 they had hauled 1,339 million tons and had taken in $4,826 million. Passenger revenues were worse: $874 million in 1929, $377 million

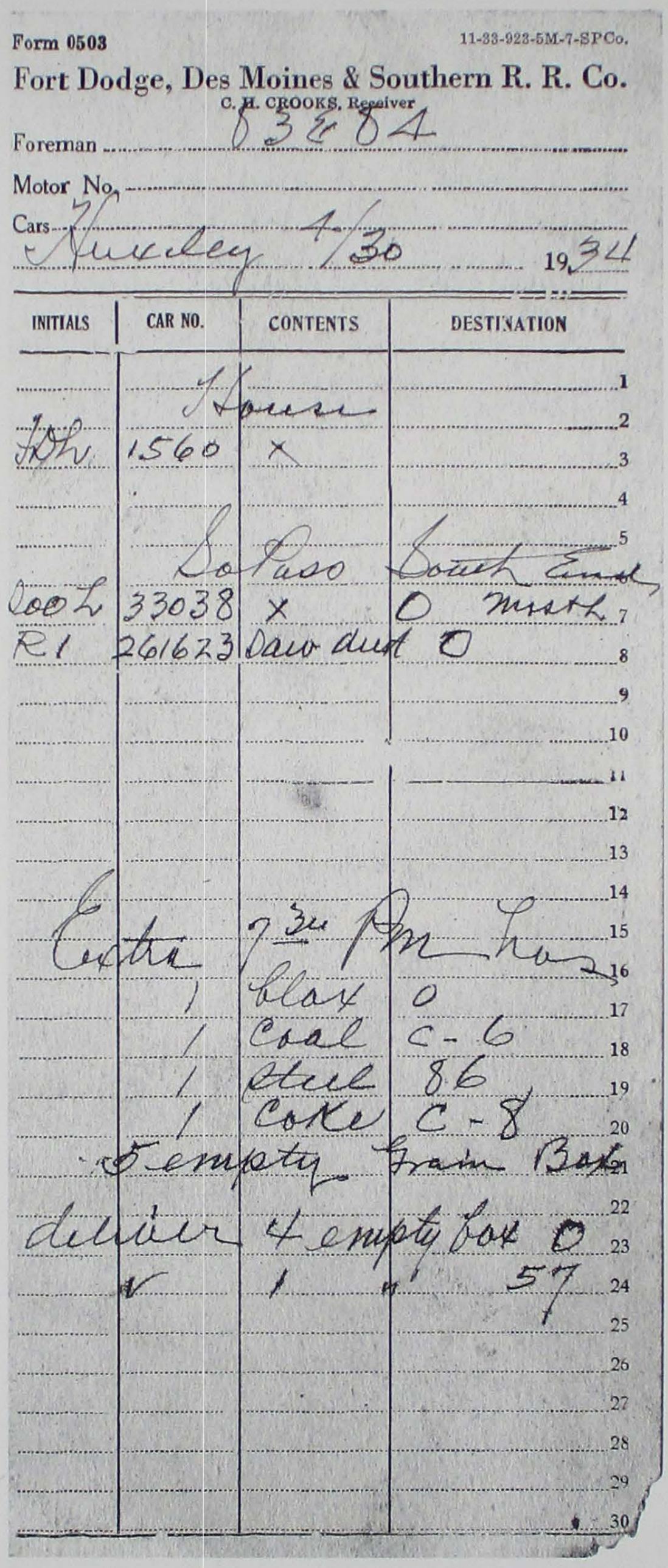
in 1932. Carriers cut operating expenses by nearly half and reduced dividends by almost three-quarters, but taxes fell by less than a third and bonded interest actually rose. Aggregate net income of $897 million in 1929 melted into a deficit of $139 million in 1932. Fifty-eight roads operating 43,681 miles of line entered receivership during the six-year period 1929-1934. [3]

Iowa roads hardly were exempt. Minneapolis & St. Louis, reflecting the agricultural recession of the 1920s, in fact, had been in receivership since 1923. Ten years later, on June 7, 1933, much larger Rock Island tumbled into the courts. Before the decade was out, M&StL and CRI&P would be joined by other Iowa steam roads—North Western, Milwaukee, Wabash, and Great Western. Several observers argued that the nation's railroad network had been overbuilt, by 30,000 miles, claimed Frederick D. Underwood, President of Erie Railroad, who saw such mileage as a "cancerous growth" that ought to be excised and who predicted that no hardship would result from elimination of such excess or superfluous trackage. Indeed, said Underwood and others, hard times of the 1930s made the moment propitious for reducing that system. [4]

President Herbert Hoover was fond of saying that prosperity was just around the corner, but his optimism was ill-placed. The five-month interval between his loss in the 1932 presidential race and the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 was the nation's most traumatic period—rivaled only by the worst days of the Civil War in 1864. President Roosevelt prescribed any number of "New Deal" nostrums but, in the end, he found no way to purge the nation of its depression illness although his medications did ease the pain. [5]

Freight billings spun downward, seemingly out of control, the result of the weakened economy, devastating modal competition, and vicissitudes of weather. Iowa intrastate ton miles plummeted from 11,232,496,865 in 1930 to 7,045,454,819 in 1934; revenues

Above: FtDDM&S during the 1930s led all Iowa electric roads in ticket sales, but revenues were nothing as they had been earlier. Train number 2 on September 24, 1939, posed for photographer John F. Humiston atop the high bridge between Fraser and Boone.



Form 0503 11-33-923-5M-7-SPCo.

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern R. R. Co.

C. H. CROOKS, Receiver

Foreman 53284

Motor No.

Cars 7 Huxley 1/30 19 34

INITIALS	CAR NO.	CONTENTS	DESTINATION
	4 Loads		1
			2
FDL	1560	X	3
			4
	La Paso		South End 5
CGW	33038	X	O Mark 7
RI	261623	Dav dirt	O 8
			9
			10
			11
			12
			13
			14
Extra	7:30	P.M.	Loads 15
			16
	1	Slag	O 17
	1	Coal	C-6 18
	1	Steel	86 19
	1	Coke	C-8 20
	5 empty	Grain	Box 21
			22
deliver	4 empty	box	O 23
	V	1	" 57 24
			25
			26
			27
			28
			29
			30

Above: After FDL sold off the vast bulk of its freight car inventory it had to rely almost entirely on connecting steam roads for car supply. The switch list from Huxley on this day in 1934 shows that the agent anticipated delivery of five empty grain boxcars and four loads from CMStP&P.

receded even more devastatingly, from $119,300,782, in 1930 to $69,882,342 in 1934. Iowa grain elevators loaded 2,345,309 tons of corn in 57,907 cars during 1930, only 1,272,855 tons in 32,019 cars for 1935. Consignment of hogs shipped from trackside pens across the state in 1930 reached 137,522 carloads, but a mere 40,277 in 1935; the pattern with cattle was much the same, 60,288 in 1930, 26,743 five years later. In 1928, 19 per cent of receipts at primary Midwestern markets such as Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City, and Sioux City had arrived by truck, up to 23 per cent in 1929, and to more than half by the mid-1930s. Less-than-carload business also was especially susceptible to truck competition, dropping from 1,125,756 tons billed out of Iowa stations in 1930 to 363,187 in 1935. [6]

Passenger receipts followed a similarly dreary path. Boardings at Iowa stations in 1935 were 2,598,411 compared to 4,470,840 in 1931, 6,689,887 in 1930. Revenues from intrastate passenger train operation (tickets, mail, express, etc.) mirrored that depressing downward spiral, $29,071,307 in 1930, $22,264,901 in 1931, $10,163,784 in 1935. [7]

Iowa's electric roads were in much worse condition than its steam roads—not surprisingly given their restricted route structures, their typically smaller constituencies, and their great vulnerability to motor vehicle competition. In 1921, Iowa interurban roads had carried 13,429,848 paying passengers, earning $2,570,734 in revenue. Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern led in passengers carried, Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern in ticket sales. And freight revenues for all Iowa electric roads had increased nicely from $1,939,727 in 1921 to $2,827,782 in 1929. [8]

But the bloom was off. Passenger boardings in 1926 totaled 7,430,666 earning $1,586,717, dropping to 4,975,772 and receipts of $972,573 in 1929. WCF&N by 1937 scheduled only three turns daily from Waterloo to Cedar Rapids, two between Waterloo and Waverly, and by the end of 1938, Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine carded only six round trips between Davenport and Clinton, none to Muscatine. Fort that matter, CD&M was about to throw in the towel—abandoning its line to Muscatine late in 1938, the remainder, from Davenport to Clinton, early in 1940. Others were similarly in trouble. Numbers told the story. Iowa electric roads carried 4,977,421 patrons in 1930, 1,948,605

Above Left & Right: FDL's passenger count plummeted. The road responsded by discontinuing passenger services on all branches, by paring its passenger car inventory from 22 in 1929 to 8 in 1933, and by reducing mainline service to only a pair of trips daily. Car 62 could slumber between runs at Des Moines. On another day it sprinted northward at Swanwood. *George Niles collection.*

in 1935, and 595,571 in 1939, receiving ticket revenue of respectively, $853,857, $268,836, and $393,541. Freight revenue also slackened, but hardly at the same rate, down to $2,785,300 in 1939 from $3,207,193 in 1930. [9]

There was nothing in the editorial or the news pages of the *Fort Dodge Messenger* for January 1930 that suggested unusual concern over the economy. Neither was there then, nor had there been earlier, anything in the news media pointing to concern over the financial health of Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. The company had paid dividends on its stock regularly from 1916 into 1921, again in 1923 and 1925, but none since. Its bonds traded in 1927 from a high of $62 to a low of $50, in 1929 from $51 to $20. Freight revenues held steady in 1928 and 1929 at a healthy annual average of $1,059,945, but the road suffered a net loss from passenger operation in 1929. The *Boone News-Republican* on May 20, 1925 had reported that 300 of the road's boxcars were strung out on sidings between Boone and Kelley—"no funds are available to repair them." In fact they were obsolete. In 1928, Fort Dodge Iron & Metal Company purchased 1,000 FDL boxcars in what the *Messenger* called "one of the largest junk deals in recent years." ($100,000 was the estimate.) These cars were not replaced

and, predictably, revenue from car hire dwindled from $527,492 in 1925 to only $125,185 in 1929. (Boone shopmen converted one condemned boxcar to an "air-operated ice cutter and flanger.) Auxiliary operations (sale of surplus electricity) ranged from $144,872 in 1925 to $134,636 in 1929—a disappointment. [10]

The news was shocking, although it should not have been given the reality of the onrushing Great Depression. It was stunning nevertheless. Interest due on FtDDM&S bonds payable on December 1, 1929, went unsatisfied. Neither were other debts met. "RECEIVERSHIP, FT. DODGE LINE" was the bold headline of the *Boone News Republican* for February 19, 1930. This had come the immediate result of a complaint by Scandia Coal Company of Des Moines which had not been paid a $7,000 bill for fuel. Clyde H. Crooks was named receiver, working under direction of Judge H. Fry and the district court. Crooks tried to put the best face on it, saying that he "did not expect creditors to lose anything in the reorganization of the company's finances." He did not estimate how long that might take. [11]

There was no legitimate reason why Crooks might be even a bit optimistic. The road, in fact, surprisingly had failed to earn operating income in 1928, losing $228,743, and, while the *Boone News-Republican* claimed that the company's "physical property was in good shape," that was not entirely correct. Indeed FDL was embarrassed early in 1930 when state regulators found that "equipment in passenger service was not in such condition as to insure reasonable degree of safety to traveling public." Crooks responded: "We acknowledge that the cars are getting old—that their appearance is not what it should be—and we are only sorry that passenger revenues on this road have shown such serious declines as to make it practically impossible for us to provide new equipment in this service." Regulators noted that most of the cars had "outlived the depreciation period," nevertheless ordering that they "be strengthened or rebuilt." Crooks, red-faced, had to comply. [12]

Clyde Crooks found himself in the most unenviable position of having to juggle needs of safe operating practice against bleakest revenue realities. Iowa in 1927 had enacted legislation demanding that "lines of railroad of more than seventeen miles in length

Above: Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Transportation Company went on the block and was quickly plucked by Interstate Transit Lines, jointly owned by C&NW and UP.

Above: A classic scene at the interurban depot. The station agent is out to greet southbound No. 66 as is stops briefly at Boxholm.
Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive

Left: There were, sad to say, an abundance of open seats during the hard times of the Great Depression on the twin daily cars dispatched over the Fort Dodge-Des Moines leg.

within the limits of the state, shall maintain a service of not less than two passenger trains every twenty-four hours over the entire line..." FDL earlier had discontinued passenger operation on all branches, maintaining four daily round trips on the Fort Dodge-Des Moines main stem. That service quickly was reduced by half, the passenger car inventory was pared from 22 in 1929 to eight in 1933, and employee numbers were trimmed from 402 in 1929 to only 268 in 1932. [13]

FtDDM&S bondholders formed a protective committee in March 1930. The company's bonds in 1930 traded in a range from $24 to $7, in 1932 from $5 to .25¢—*Poor's* properly labeling them "very speculative." Prospects for reorganization —if at all possible—seemed dim. [14]

In fiscal 1930, FDL sold $72,638 in tickets and the road earned a very tiny net profit of $49,118 from operation, but with interest and taxes due turned in a disappointing net loss of $201,289. The future looked anything but bright. Options were few. Homer Loring fidgeted. He scrutinized every one of the company's assets. Were there any that could be sold to benefit the balance sheet? The bus subsidiary? Loring had seen to creation of Fort Dodge, Des

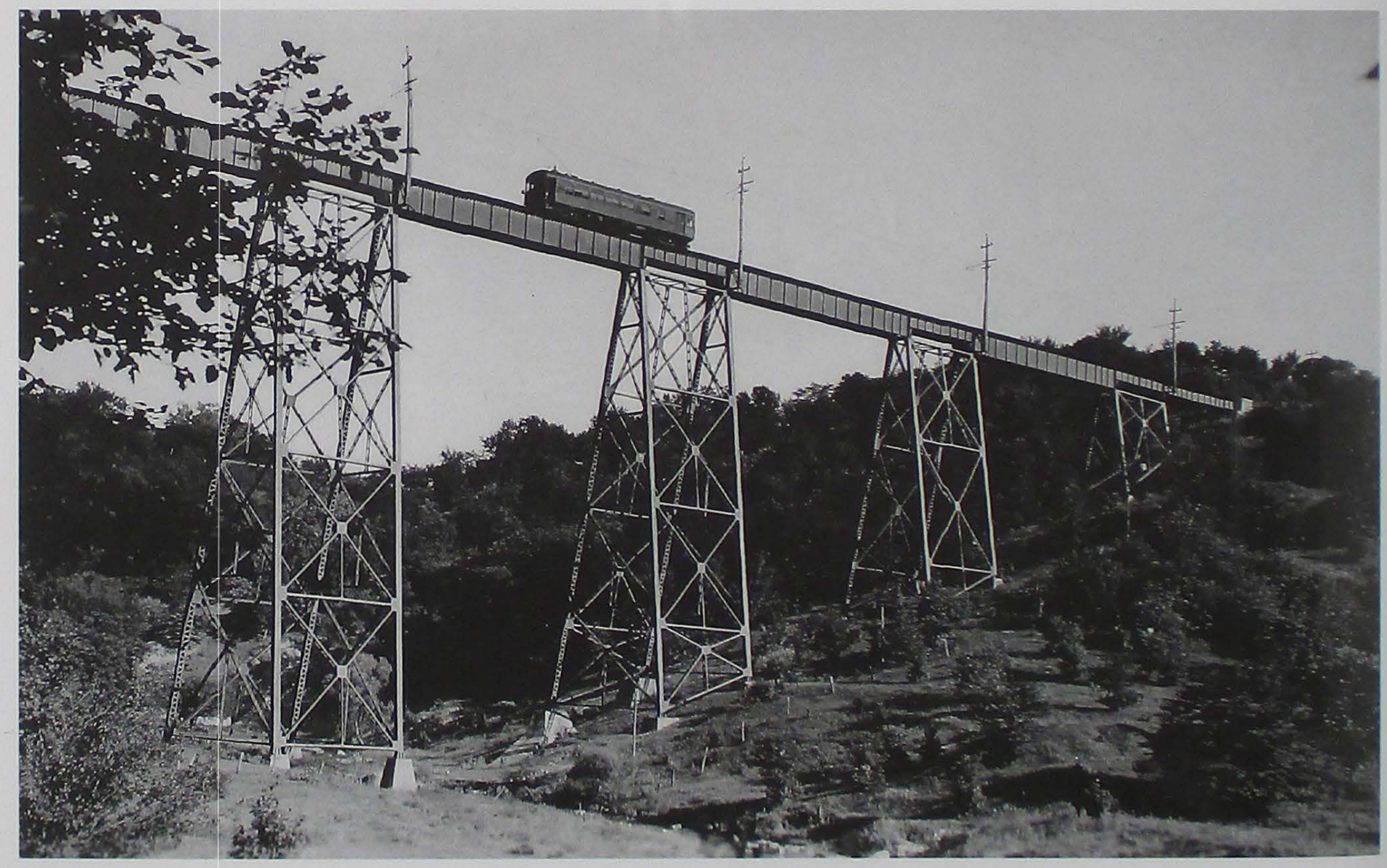
Moines & Southern Transportation Company, had seen it expand and flourish as the data on this table demonstrates.

Fiscal Year	Operating Revenue	Operating Expense	Net*
1927	$133,120	$131,661	$ 1,459
1928	$163,936	$155,212	$10,471
1929	$189,221	$149,483	$25,878
1930	$319,124	$274,328	$21,107
1931	$350,359	$268,849	$52,895

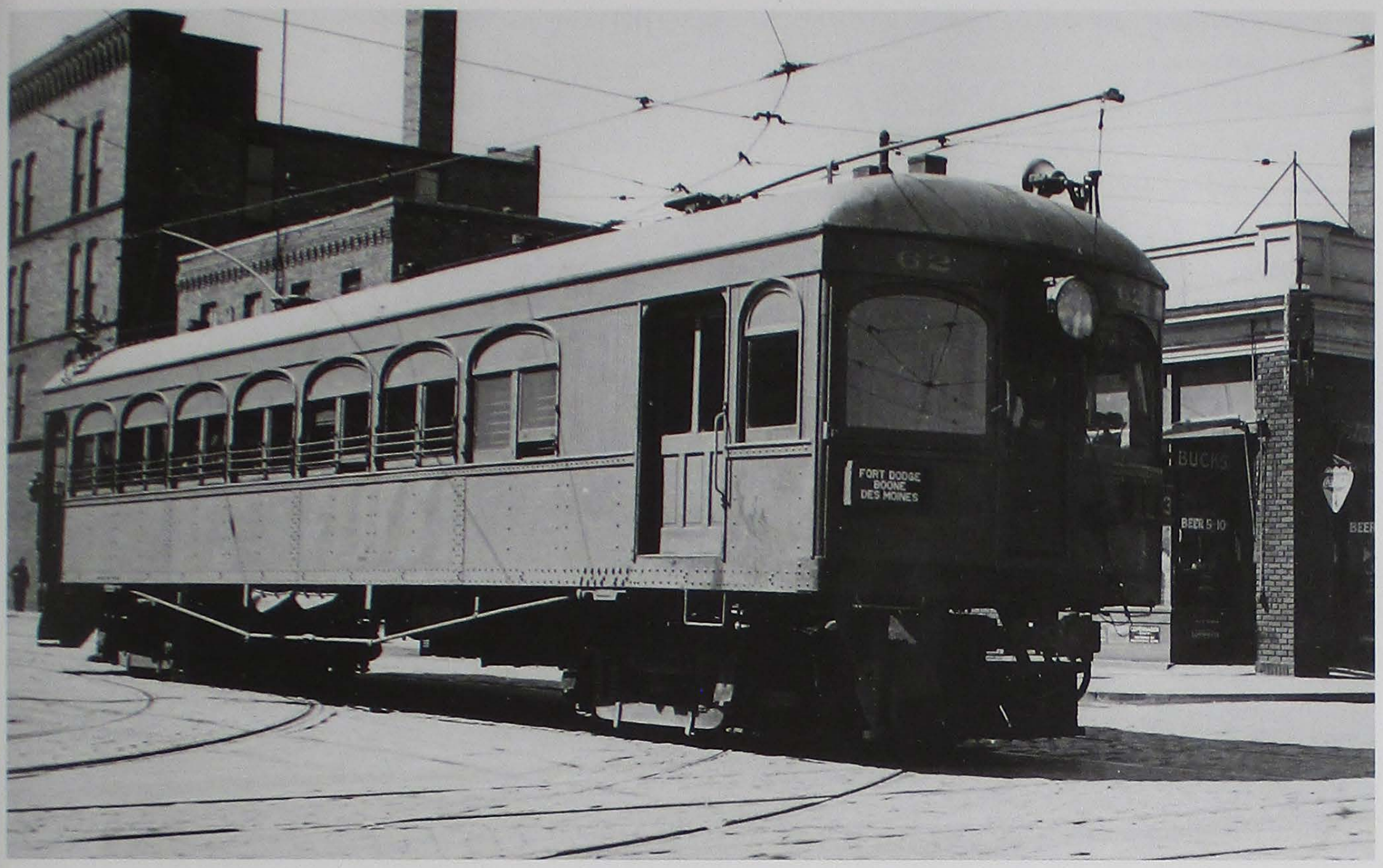
*After tax/overhead

For Loring, the receiver, and the court the issue was stark. Was the bus subsidiary worth more to the company in the long run or was disposal of it required to help save the company from extinction? [15]

Railway Age throughout this period of time featured a very impressive "Motor Transport Section" and kept close tabs on vehicular competition and in the growing use of buses and motor trucks within the industry. In 1928 *Age* noted that giant Southern Pacific had doubled the size of its highway fleet." By the end of 1929 fully 78 steam loads had 2,389 motor coaches in operation. In Iowa, even tiny Manchester & Oneida opted for "motor coach service in its territory" and mighty Illinois Central soon would introduce bus service on its Fort Dodge-Waterloo route. Other area steam roads likewise were in the bus business—Chicago & North Western; Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific; Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; and, Union Pacific among them. *Railway Age* also followed the consolidation of motor coach lines—"four railroads interested in Greyhound Lines" as an example—and took particular note when Interstate Transit Lines, motor coach subsidiary jointly owned by Chicago & North Western and Union Pacific, expanded its service territory by acquisition of smaller operators in Minnesota and South Dakota. [16]



Above: Ridership all but vanished. Ticket sales for 1936 was a minisculte $9,285. A lonely car transits the high bridge between Fraser and Boone. *R.D. Kimmel photograph. George Niles collection.*



Above: Car 62 readies to depart the Des Moines & Central Iowa station in Des Moines in June 1935. Des Moines street running ended on January 1, 1938. *Robert V. Mehlenbeck photo; Norman Carlson collection*

It seemed there was no choice. Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Transportation Company went on the block and was quickly plucked by Interstate Transit Lines, the joint venture of C&NW and UP. The announced sales price was $275,000 for the franchise and assets (50 buses); transfer in ownership was made effective on March 1, 1931. There was bitter irony in the fact that one of the bus routes now passed to Interstate was in the Fort Dodge-Boone-Des Moines corridor—direct competition to beleaguered FtDDM&S. [17]

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Insofar as Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern was concerned, Homer Loring mostly stayed in the shadows throughout the 1920s. He certainly showed his hand in the matter of FDL's bus subsidiary, but in the main he gave the company's onsite management team full reign. Nearer to his Boston home he labored on behalf of those holding securities of Massachusetts electric railways and successfully engineered reorganization of Bay State Street Railway. Early in 1924 he was elected to the board of directors of Boston & Maine and quickly became chairman of the powerful executive committee. Boston & Maine at the time was controlled by larger but similarly debt-ridden New York, New Haven & Hartford and Loring predictably found himself deeply involved in the affairs of that company as well. On December 20, 1924, Loring announced plans for reorganizing Boston & Maine—threatening to abandon 1000 miles of line, suing to prevent bus competition for passengers in the company's service area, and establishing Boston & Maine Transportation Company as the railway's own bus arm to serve communities when rail service ended and to supplement trains with buses on certain rail routes out of Boston and Portland. The same pattern followed at New York, New Haven & Hartford in 1925 by founding New England Transportation Company to operate buses on routes following junking of rail lines and elsewhere over "unprofitable" rail routes. All of it, of course, provided the model Loring employed on the Fort Dodge Line. [18]

Homer Loring did not seek publicity and publicity did not seek him. Reticent to the point of appearing secretive, slight of build, bespectacled, Loring preferred public silence—issuing only occasional terse statements such as that of March 7, 1928 when he announced his departure from the Boston & Maine board after putting through what all hands acknowledge was a successful reorganization plan. A writer for the *New York Times* called Loring "an experienced rejuvenator" and a "doctor of ailing industries," citing Boston & Marine but also Bay State Street Railway, Michigan's Saginaw Traction Company, Nevada Consolidated Copper Company, and, of course, FtDDM&S. Apart from his business activities, Loring also found time to serve as chairman of the Massachusetts State Commission of Administration and Finance and he was active in the state's Republican Party. Late in 1928, Loring turned to the ill-starred textile industry, merging various companies, and founding United Merchants & Manufacturing Incorporated. Over the next decade he would be mostly active outside the railroad industry. [19]

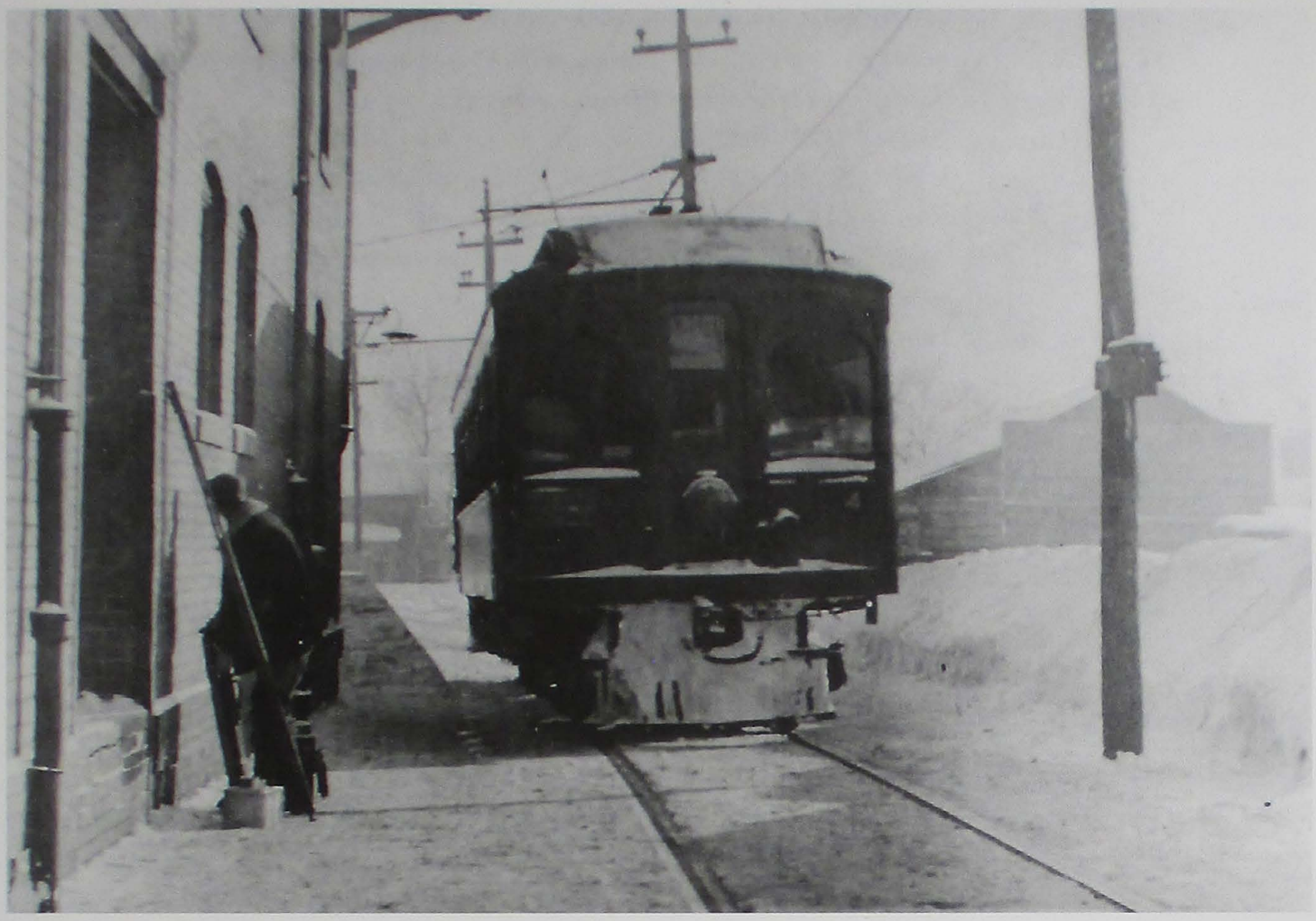
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

In an earlier time a thoroughly despondent President Abraham Lincoln had bitterly exclaimed that "the bottom is out of the tub" when confronted with a broad assortment of bad news early in the Civil War. Those associated with Fort Dodge Line in 1932 must have felt similarly when the road suffered a stunning net loss of $266,701 from operations, a staggering net loss of $579,103. Passenger revenue (tickets, mail, express) skidded to a paltry $12,667, freight dipped to $405,633. There simply was no good news and utterly no reason to be optimistic. Anything that could be jettisoned was disposed of. By the end of 1936 the company would be down to 12 locomotives, 5 passenger cars, and a mere 89 freight cars—a shadow of its former self. [20]

Ridership all but vanished. Ticket sales for 1936 were a miniscule $9,285. The road collected $67,347 in passenger fares, mail, and express for the four year period 1933-1936. A few analysts recommended a reduction in fares to lure more customers. FtDDM&S in 1932 dropped rates to two cents per mile, gaining a few more riders but little additional income. Indeed, there remained an abundance of open seats on the two daily cars in each direction between Fort Dodge and Des Moines. [21]

Freight revenue ranged from $867,975 in 1930 to $653,534 in 1936 (only $405,633 in 1932) and averaged $506,673 for the six-year period. Business was scarce but traffic solicitors were dogged and the company missed not a beat in hustling for any shipment. Live poultry moved from a Boone shipper, gypsum rock flowed from Fort Dodge pits to cement plants at West Des Moines, brick moved from off line to Boone and Ames, "unfinished hosiery, in canvas bags" was billed from Des Moines to Boone, wool left Fort Dodge, Harcourt, Gowrie, and Rockwell City for Des Moines, crushed stone took a short trip from Ames to Campus, plaster and stucco left Fort Dodge for Cedar Rapids and any number of additional destinations, sand and gravel from Fraser and Des Moines found customers in Fort Dodge and Campus. And FtDDM&S sought lower rates to attract carload and even less-than-carload lots of "sand, gravel, crushed stone, brick and clay products, cement, coal, coke and scrap iron"—often "to meet truck competition." The production of Iowa coal had peaked in 1917, but in the 1930s Boone remained one of the state's leading coal-producing counties, much of it moving to the Fraser generating plant, but coal consignments handled by FDL increasingly came from off-line pits, often out of state. [22]

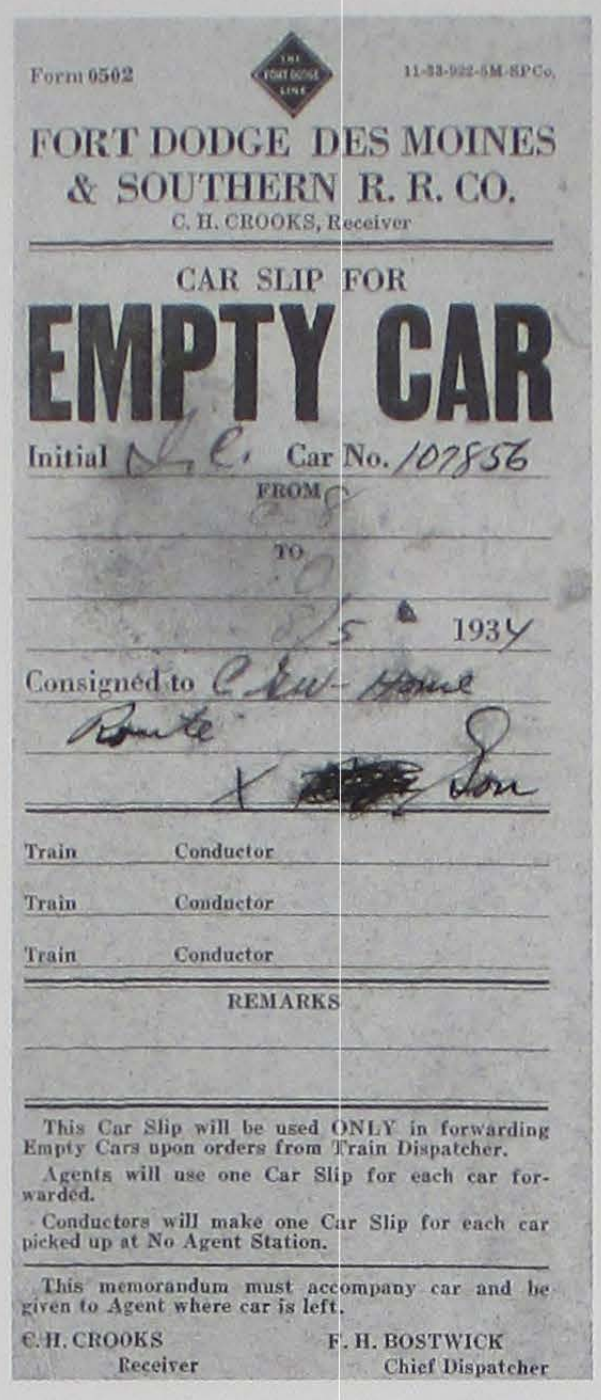
Fair-minded observers logically could have concluded that vicissitudes of the Great Depression would cut evenly against all modes of transport, but various New Deal and other public "make work" programs served to greatly aid the motor vehicle sector against the country's investor owned railroads. At Fort Dodge, the *Messenger* exclaimed that "in 1929, Webster County became 'road minded', or, in other words, started to pave its seventy-five miles of primary roads." Iowa already boasted "five highways paved or graveled the entire length of the state east and west and, curiously, the depression year of 1930 proved to be the peak year of construction in the entire history of Iowa roads. In 1931, the state's highway commission proudly boasted: "Iowa is no longer a mud road state." By 1939, over 5,000 miles of the state's highways would be paved and more than 35,000 miles graveled. All of this pleased the auto-minded public. Domestic manufacturers produced the 50 millionth automobile early in the 1930s and over the decade nationwide auto registrations rose from 23,059,000 in 1930 to 26,201,000 in 1939—hard times notwithstanding. Indeed, in 1936, automobile companies sold more cars than in any years other than 1928 and 1929. Americans clung almost wistfully



Above: The frigid winter of 1935-1936 plauged all Iowa railroads. February was especially dismal, FDL blocked for days. The crew of this car at Boone hoped for good luck on this trip.

to their beloved motor vehicles. At Fort Dodge Arnold Motor Company advertised the 614 Durant, proclaiming its "hill climbing ability and quality seating that withstand hard everyday useage," and Fort Dodge Motor Company asserted the value and utility of Studebaker's "Big 6-Passenger Cruising Sedan—"Surprising Gas Economy"—for only $665. Railroaders celebrated none of this except, of course, and ironically, freight billings that came from delivering set up automobiles and materials for road building. [23]

Iowans and the railroad companies that served them suffered collectively through the Great Depression and the "dirty thirties." Drought hit Iowa in 1930 and again in 1934 and 1936. Forage crops and grain withered in brutal heat. Clouds filled with dirt from western Iowa were evident as far east as Anamosa; cinch bugs and seventeen-year locusts plagued southeast Iowa. "We would pick corn all day in the same wagon and barely see the corn in the wagon by nightfall," recalled a farmer from Churdan. Many farmers actually did their field work after dark to avoid the devastating heat of day. Hard times in the heartland predictably attracted the attention of politicians. President Franklin Roosevelt arrived in Des Moines on September 3, 1936, aboard a special Rock Island train for the Governors' Drought Conference, but there was little that even high-powered public servants could do about the weather. Early in the spring of 1936 much of Fort Dodge Line's service area was hit by tornadoes, hail, and even a dusting of Oklahoma dirt. Hail storms in July wiped out crops and grasshoppers became a serious menace. There was no pheasant hunting in the state that year—the stock of birds depleted by drought. [24]


Form 0502 11-33-922-5M-SPCo.

FORT DODGE DES MOINES & SOUTHERN R. R. CO.
C. H. CROOKS, Receiver

CAR SLIP FOR
EMPTY CAR

Initial D. M. & S. Car No. 107856
FROM
TO
15 1934
Consigned to C. & N. W. Home Route
X [redacted] Son

Train Conductor
Train Conductor

REMARKS

This Car Slip will be used ONLY in forwarding Empty Cars upon orders from Train Dispatcher.
Agents will use one Car Slip for each car forwarded.
Conductors will make one Car Slip for each car picked up at No Agent Station.

This memorandum must accompany car and be given to Agent where car is left.

C. H. CROOKS, Receiver
F. H. BOSTWICK, Chief Dispatcher

Above: Freight sales rose from $521,231 in 1936 to $835,863 in 1939. This gondola was made empty and FDL returned it to Chicago Great Western--"home route," rule in force.

As often happened, sizzling summers were followed by frigid winters. That of 1935-1936 was a doozy. It started with a Christmas Eve storm in 1935 and lingered through March. Depressing gray skies, heavy snow, and bitter winds lasted for days; clearing brought sun dogs and bone-chilling cold temperatures. February 1936 proved brutal in the extreme, especially in central and northwestern Iowa. Railroaders fought valiantly to keep lines open, often losing those battles. Snow and wind—"those twin weapons of torture," as the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* put it—locked a Great Western freight in drifts near Oelwein, a Rock Island passenger near LaPorte City, and an IC mixed near Plainfield. A CMStP&P engineer stopped his passenger train near Mason City to pick up the driver and passengers from a marooned bus, but Milwaukee's Iowa & Dakota Division to the west was itself often blocked, as was the line from Des Moines to Spirit Lake. It was the same on the Iowa Division of both Milwaukee and IC. The headline of the *Des Moines Register* for February 9 said bluntly: "ALL IOWA PARALYZED IN STORM." IC had freight trains stalled in snow at Marcus, Ulmer, Edna, and Rockwell City, and one section of its Hawkeye was entrapped at Sulphur Springs and another at Marcus. IC's plow train struggling up the Sioux Falls Branch picked up an additional assignment by transporting a physician from Gaza to Primghar when public roadways were blown shut. Serious coal shortages surfaced at communities large and small. Schools were closed for days and then weeks; church services were canceled; and, the Iowa Liquor Commission announced that all stores in the state would be open for only six hours each work day until the fuel shortage ended. [25]

The *Fort Dodge Messenger* declared that "no winter month [January] in years caused so many inconveniences." Of course it only got worse. "The wildest blizzard of a record winter stormed out of the north," the *Messenger* groaned on February 4. FDL was blocked; no passenger car would leave Fort Dodge, the company announced, until 4:00 p.m. the next day. But that car could not leave, the line south still blocked. Then on February 8 came another blizzard sweeping out of the north. All trains on all roads in and out of Fort Dodge were annulled "until the storm's fury is spent." That fury continued. FtDDM&S hoped to resume service by sundown on the 11th. Nevertheless, schedules were not met until the 13th. Shortage of coal forced closing of Fort Dodge schools and shortening of business hours. FDL hoped to deliver "a substantial coal shipment" on the 15th. Then another storm hit; more digging out. The crew of a northbound car was told that the East Fort Dodge yard was snowbound, to tie up at Harcourt, to protect themselves and their passengers, and wait out the storm. The next day a freight motor and wedge plow arrived from Boone to open the line—the car to follow. The going was especially tough in a long cut south of Summit. "One could step off the roof of the passenger car onto the top of the drift," exclaimed one weary employee. Matters often were worse on the branches. Gowrie, as an example, was without train service for several days and schools there were closed for more than two weeks. Conditions gradually improved. One thoughtful FDL motorman stopped his car briefly each trip near Shady Oak to feed a friendly doe that otherwise would have perished in the harsh conditions of this most awful winter. Finally, it was over—the worst winter in 117 years, according to the *Des Moines Register*. [26]

But the Great Depression dragged on. Near the end of August 1937, the stock market experienced a shudder and business across the country showed signs of slackening. By fall the market was demoralized; prices would not bottom out until April 1938, then only after losing about two-thirds of gains registered since the nadir in early 1933. Business dropped over the same precipice. Industrial production fell by one-third in only nine months,

showing no symptoms of recovery until May 1938. Nevertheless, those directing the affairs of Iowa's railroads could take heart that intrastate passenger boardings and revenue for the last four years of the decade had turned up modestly and had stabilized; passengers averaged 3,167,116 per annum, revenues averaged $6,355,182. The same pattern obtained in freight. Intrastate car miles averaged 9,162,259,000, revenues $75,510,000. The picture was not rosy but neither was it desperate. Carriers had pared route miles and train miles, dumped some of their money-losing operations, and had junked excess equipment to match current demand. [27]

Financial analysts nevertheless were extremely pessimistic about the state of and the future for the country's railroads. Moody's argued that the "ninety-year cycle of expansion and prosperity for the railroads" had ended in 1920, then pointed to the railroads' retrogression and "the rails' chronic ills," namely: "unremitting competition which has taken the more profitable freight traffic"; "labor costs which are excessive and to a large extent do not represent time worked"; and, "the low level of business activity generally, particularly in the heavy industries." This, said Moody's, had led to the "virtual disappearance of earning power, precarious finances, and poor credit"—all "current manifestations of these more basic ills." [28]

It was against that stubbornly cheerless backdrop that FtDDM&S soldiered on. Ticket sales, $13,268 in fiscal 1936, dipped to only $11,507 in 1939. Freight sales rose from $521,231 in 1936 to $835,863 in 1939. The operating ratio hit a thoroughly alarming 121.11 in 1936, but dropped fortunately to a tolerable 91.65 in 1939. Clyde Crooks looked endlessly for means to cut expenses. Operating over street trackage came to an end at Des Moines on January 1, 1938—cars no longer running into and out of the Des Moines & Central Iowa depot, but now to a small FDL station at the foot of Capitol Hill. Acquisition of new equipment was out of the question, although the road had acquired one new 75-ton freight motor back in 1931. [29]

Financial reorganization rocked along. A new bondholder's committee was formed in 1938 and pledged an aggressive campaign under Section 77 of the Bankruptcy Act of 1898. Clyde Crooks, receiver since 1930, was joined by Des Moines lawyer L. J. Dickinson as joint trustees looking to birth a new corporation. That effort, however, would not go forward with Homer Loring who had been the company's majordomo, if more recently in the shadows, for three decades. Loring, age 63, died unexpectedly on June 20, 1939. [30]

Above: Train number 1, car 66, hustled out of Des Moines on September 25, 1939, en route to Fort Dodge. The company could no longer lean on Homer Loring who had died earlier that year. Could there be any good news for Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern? *John F. Humiston photograph.*


62
FORT DODGE
BOONE
DES MOINES

10

Revival

Deep-snow winters, glare-sun summers, and hard times of the "dirty thirties" etched deep furrows into mahogany faces of Iowa railroaders. Those grim days of depression coupled with hellacious weather conditions in many seasons had greatly tested all of them and their employers as well. They had withstood much, and could take pride in that, but they also had reason to be apprehensive. Net earnings from operations within the state by steam roads in 1939, $17,511,534, was only the approximate average they had established during years of the century's first decade, but at least it was well up from the dismal and frightening low of $9,808,825 recorded in 1935; route miles of 9,031 were down appreciably from the high of 10,018 in 1914. What did the future hold? The past seemed an inconclusive prognosticator. Small wonder Iowa railroaders faced the 1940s with more than a bit of nervousness. 1

Yet there were glimmers of hope. Weather conditions had moderated and demand for agricultural product tipped upward to bring hope not only for farmers but also for those who lived in towns and cities. The National Industrial Conference Board estimated that 9.5 million Americans remained out of work in 1939, but that did not dampen the mood in New York City where on April 30 gates to the World's Fair were opened to a vast enclosure called the "Court of Peace." That world was severely and irrevocably shaken a few months later, however, when Nazi Germany set Europe ablaze with still another war. The year 1940 proved a watershed. In Europe, Adolph Hitler gobbled up and occupied a huge expanse from Norway through France while a monumental air war raged over England. Instincts of isolation tugged mightily on American heartstrings, but President Franklin Roosevelt did all he could to prepare the country for a war he thought inevitable. Congress grudgingly concurred, authorizing major military appropriations, enacting the first peacetime draft, and calling the National Guard into federal service. 2

Railroad managers, greatly traumatized by hard times and by recurring threats of nationalization during the depression, mostly took defensive positions as demand for transportation increased. They rightly had allowed equipment inventories to sag during the 1930s to match reduced need, but now were reluctant to place orders for power, rolling stock, and plant improvement, unconvinced that recovery was genuine and long term. They hesitated even as the industry in 1940 rang up higher operating revenues than in any year since 1930 much of it war-related. Railroad leaders pondered and fussed, also recalling unpleasant consequences of the United States Railroad Administration during the Great War and after. Yet events of 1914-1918 had shown, in fact, that some sort of centralized planning was essential in time of war. With this in mind, President Roosevelt in September 1939 had appointed a War Resources Board and a National Defense Advisory Commission shortly thereafter. 3

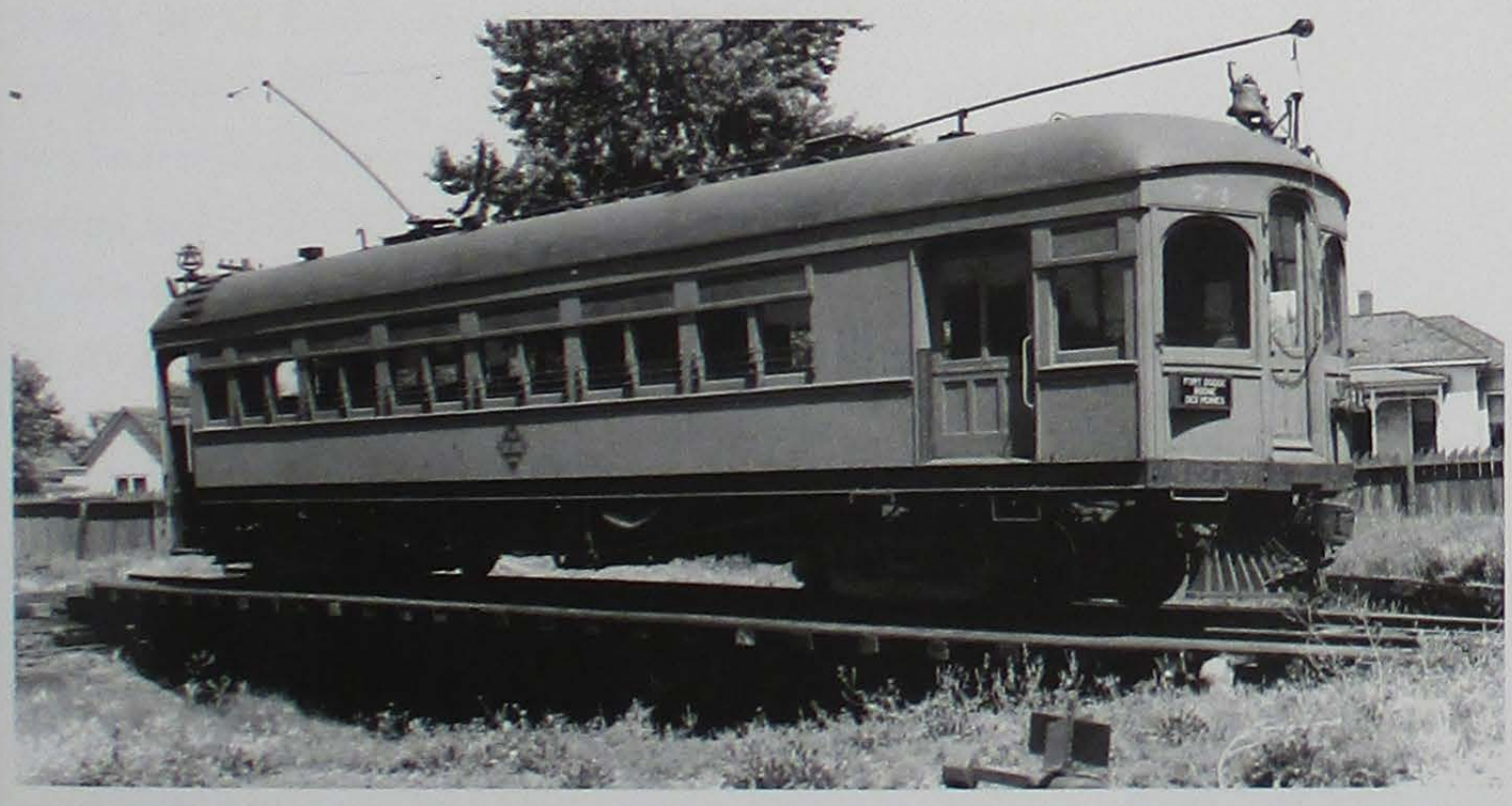
Above: On July 13, 1940, FDL ran a special train for railroad enthusiasts that covered a large segment of the road's route miles including the now freight-only Ames branch. Here car 62 soaks up sun rays in front of the attractive depot at Ames. *John. F. Humiston photograph.*

Above: The imposing high bridge near Fraser was an obligatory camera stop. *John F. Humiston photograph.*

Events at Pearl Harbor dramatically accelerated patterns already under way. "UNITED STATES AT WAR!," boldly declared the ominous headline of the *Des Moines Register* for December 8, 1941. American industrial and agricultural production surged. Iowa, arguably the most agricultural of all states, found itself suddenly in the lap of prosperity. Total farm income for the Hawkeye state in 1942 was nearly double that of 1939, and Iowa ranked first in production of corn, hogs, oats, horses, chickens, popcorn, value of land and farm buildings, value of farm implements, and percentage of improved farm land; it ranked second in creamery butter, soy beans, and beef cattle. Agriculture was hardly Iowa's only "war industry," but farm products, as always, were central to the state's economy—and now central to the country's war effort. And on Iowa's railroads, no less than the nation's carriers, was placed an unprecedented demand for transportation. [4]

Above: Passenger extra 62 probed the Webster City branch which had not seen regular passenger service for more than a decade. FDL's plain depot is at right, Illinois Central's much more impressive facility is at left, Chicago & North Western's track lying between FDL and IC. *John. F. Humiston photograph.*

Above: The most picturesque portion of this special trip was down the line to Lehigh where photographer John F. Humiston captured car 62 next to the venerable depot. The ghost of Walter Willson must have smiled.



Above: America's railways would be stretched by demands of war. FDL, of course, would be a player. Car 74, one of only five remaining passenger units on the property, rides the turntable at Boone on July 13, 1940. *John F. Humiston photograph.*

Japanese incursions in the Pacific cut off the major supply of cultivated rubber and German submarines viciously attacked and sank tankers carrying crude oil from the Gulf Coast to refineries on the eastern seaboard. Total war enveloped the United States. The federal government quickly imposed strict rationing of rubber tires across the domestic sector—husbanding rubber stock for planes, tanks, and other impedimenta of war—and then extended rationing of gasoline. The nation finally threw off the awful trauma of the Great Depression, converting with amazing swiftness to a wartime footing. By September 1942, the economy would achieve full employment—indeed, there would be a labor shortage. The change was especially dramatic at Detroit and elsewhere in the motor vehicle industry. Manufacture of all civilian passenger cars and trucks ended in 1942, Ford, for example, rolling out its last car on February 20. Thereafter Ford churned out B-24 bombers, gliders, and Jeeps; General Motors produced 75-millimeter shells, Howitzers, and army trucks; Packard rolled out Rolls-Royce Merlin V-12 aircraft engines; Hudson supplied frames for B-26 bombers; and Chrysler delivered M3 Sherman tanks and ambulances. Iowa agriculture, mostly in the doldrums for the previous two decades, now would be engrossed in a gigantic battle to increase food production. All of it reflected the national defense emergency—total mobilization. [5]

During the financial crisis of the 1930s nearly all observers concluded that the country's railway system had intolerable excess capacity given the growth of other modes—especially highway transportation. Now, however, truckers faced the serious issue of tire and fuel rationing and a growing scarcity of drivers. An abundance of motor vehicles—trucks as well as passenger cars—came off the roadways. Railways could reassert themselves. They would be stretched. [6]

The cumulative effect of these colossal changes were slow to impact fortunes of Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. Unlike other carriers, especially most steam roads, FDL had little excess capacity—its freight car inventory, for instance, down to a mere 56 units (restricted to intraline service) and only 12 freight motors. Nearby Cedar Rapids & Iowa City and Des Moines & Central Iowa had picked up used but relatively modern passenger cars made surplus by other electric roads, but Clyde Crooks chose to ignore such opportunities and the court may not have agreed to such acquisitions anyway. By 1941, FDL had but five passenger cars with maximum seating for 240 persons. And the road's track structure was, as it had been for ages, untreated ties without tie plates or anchors, 70-pound Cambria rail dating mostly from 1906, and cinder ballast. [6]

Above: Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern finally shed the yoke of receivership.

FDL in 1939 had earned a modest profit from operations, explained essentially by rising freight revenues. The same pattern followed in fiscal 1940 through 1943, with slightly improved freight billings, but net profit remained elusive due to tax liabilities and interest obligations. Passenger revenue stubbornly resisted improvement—$16,438 in fiscal 1939, $18,504 in 1942. Yet the operating ratio put a smile on all faces, dropping from 91.65 in 1939 to an impressive 76.40 in 1943. [7]

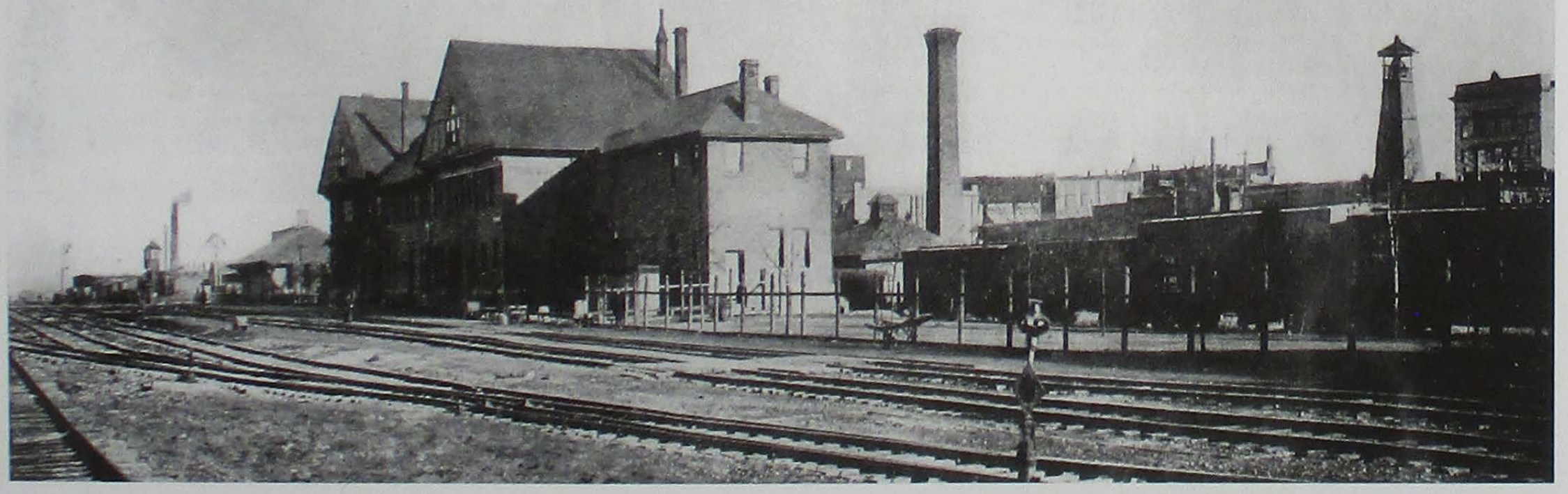
FDL's financial performance from 1939 onward was encouraging. The court took notice. So did the company's Bondholder Protective Committee which as early as January 1940 proposed reorganization under section 77 of the Bankruptcy Act. Pulling and hauling followed. The United States District Court for Southern Iowa and the Interstate Commerce Commission finally agreed to a plan of reorganization and on November 25, 1942, the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Company, a new corporation, was birthed under the laws of Iowa "for the purpose of taking over the properties of the debtor and continuing the operation of its business...." The company's capitalization was reduced from $10,162,791 to $3,672,500 ($2,260,000 four per cent income mortgage bonds and 141,250 shares of common stock of $10 par value). Holders of preferred and common stock in the old company were wiped out. [8]

Clyde H. Crooks was named president of the "new" company. It underscored a remarkably stable cadre of managers who saw the property through thick and thin. Walter R. Dyer continued as vice president and general counsel; Frank M. Johnston served as vice president and treasurer; C. M. Kelly still controlled operations as

Above: Train X62, CERA's first fantrip on FDL, pauses at Alleman. John Humiston snapped the photo on July 13, 1940. *Norman Carlson collection*

superintendent; and, R. L. Cooper continued as chief engineer. And Boone yet served as headquarters city for the Fort Dodge Line. Ironically, unlike newspapers in other Iowa communities where railroads figured prominently (Marshalltown and Waterloo as examples), the *Boone News-Republican* paid relatively little attention to the local rail scene where Chicago & North Western boasted an important division point and substantial roundhouse and where FtDDM&S had its main office and shops.

The war years of 1941-1945 provided American railroads with their finest hour—furnishing 97 per cent of all domestic troop movements and about 90 per cent of domestic military freight transportation. Ton miles skyrocketed in 1942, leapt again in 1943, and peaked in 1944. The bulge in passenger traffic occurred in the same years, but was even sharper; revenue passenger miles in 1944 exceeded those of 1939 by 322 per cent. In 1944, the country's railroads produced 737 billion ton miles, the greatest volume of traffic to that time—this in addition to 95.6 billion passenger miles, a figure twice that of 1918; 100 million



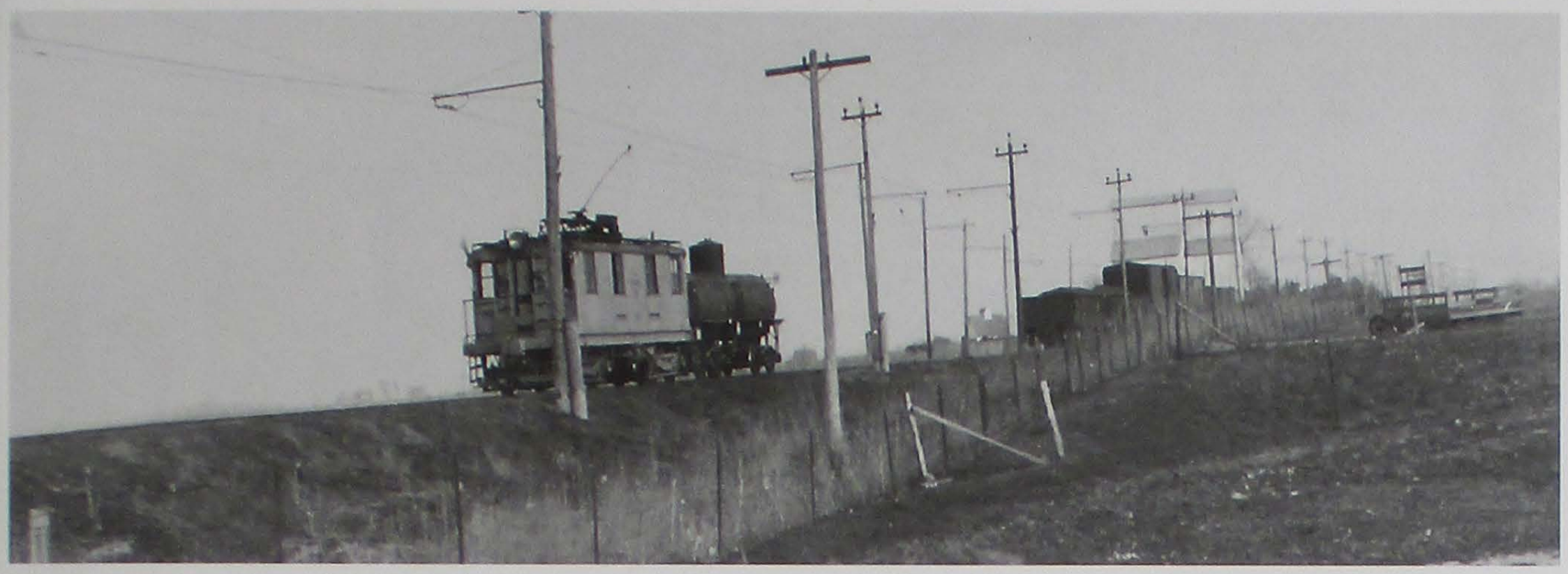
Above: The *Boone News-Republican* paid relatively little attention to the local rail scene where Chicago & North Western boasted an important division point and substantial facilities.

Above: Motorman H.S. Hardic poses in the cab of No. 62 in Fort Dodge on September 24, 1939. Window screens disappeared with the end of Fort Dodge street running in 1940. *John F. Humiston photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: After street running ended cars were turned at Fort Dodge on a loop track at the end of private right-of-way. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph*

meals were served aboard dining cars—nearly 500 per cent more than before the war. At the peak of war effort, America's railroads handled about 72 per cent of commercial freight tonnage and more than 74 per cent of intercity passenger traffic. [9]

FtDDM&S was a bit player in all of this, but it was an important bit player. As the public felt the full impact of gasoline and tire rationing substantial numbers of persons rediscovered "the interurban." Indeed, the creaky old cars came to groan under demand, taking on 45,943 revenue patrons in 1942, 60,150 in 1943, leaping to 91,517 in 1944, and a whopping 100,863 in 1945. No MAIN (Military Authorization Identification) trains appeared on FDL, but Clyde Crooks found pleasurable necessity in doubling daily round trip service—from two to four—on the 85-mile run from Fort Dodge to Des Moines—two hours and forty-five minutes en route. The cars, occasionally in multiple, often were



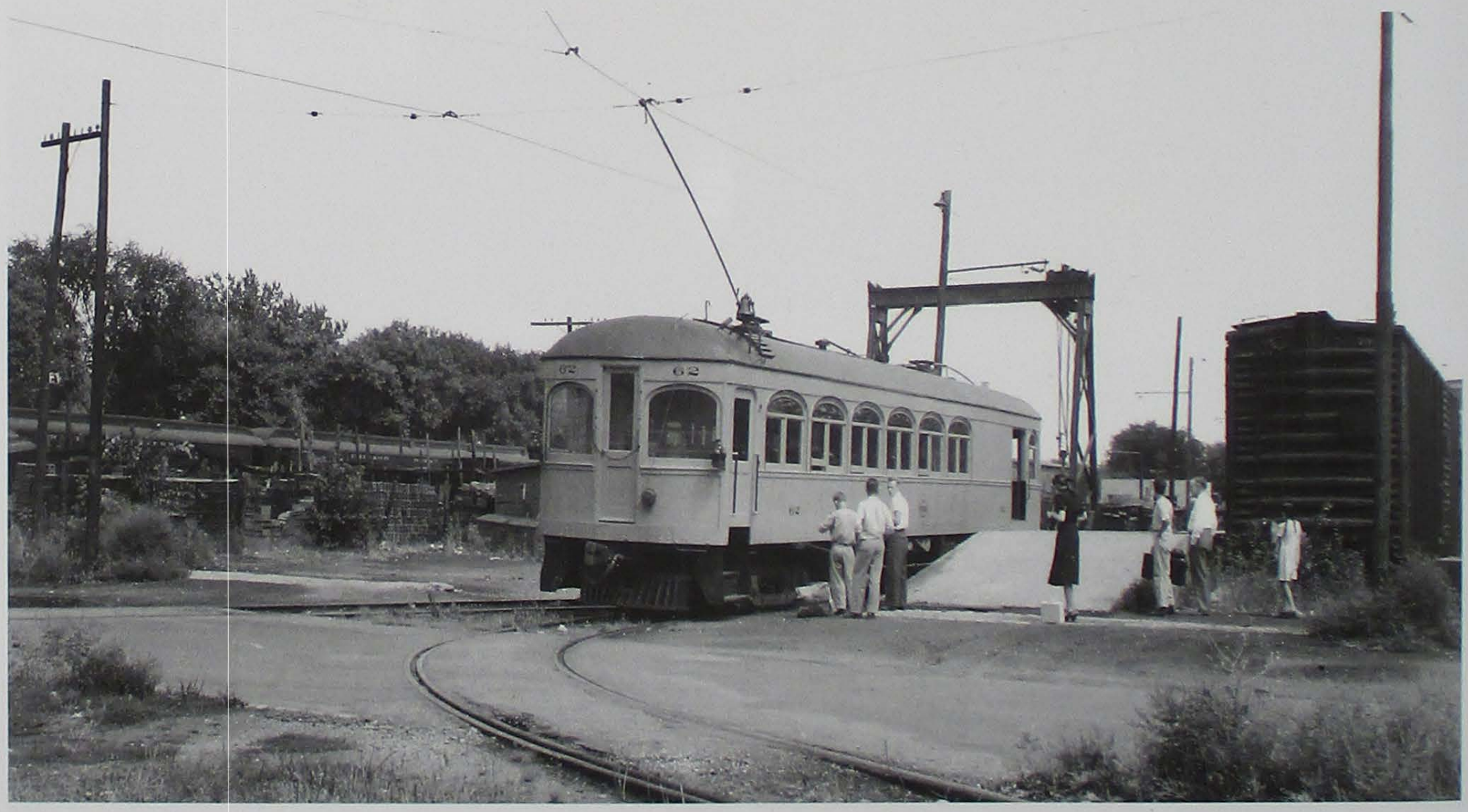
Above: An unusual daylight freight extra sets out a car at Napier. FDL's freight revenues during the war were surprisingly flat. *William F. Armstrong photograph.*

Above: FDL moved little freight lading bearing on the war effort but local customers in and about Des Moines were enough to keep motors such as 209 busy on a routine basis. *George Niles photograph.*

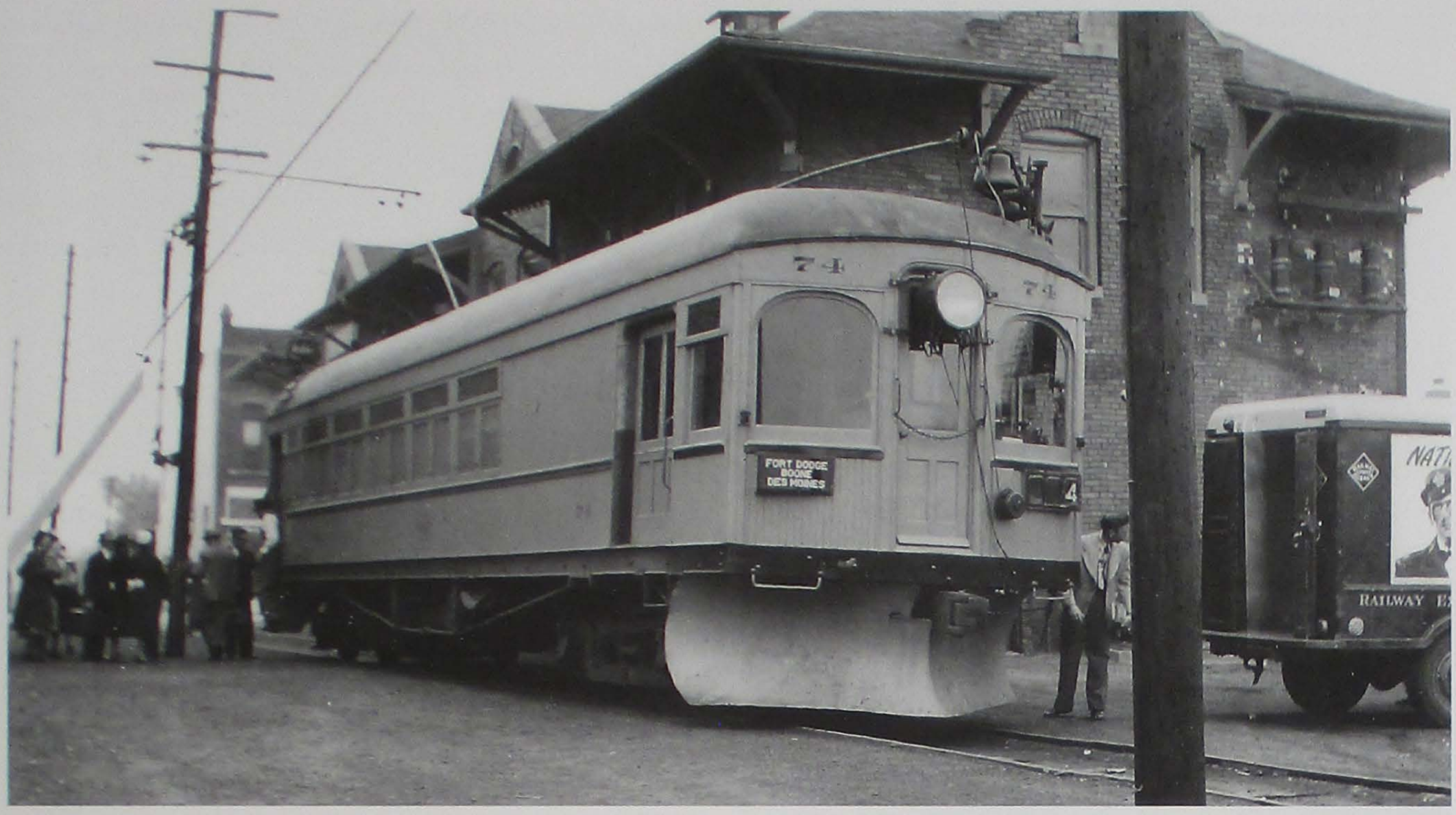
swamped—persons standing in the aisles, hanging on in the open vestibules, a few bouncing around in the baggage section. With only five cars left in the fleet, there simply was no surplus capacity; shop forces at Boone did a monumental job of maintenance to keep the venerable equipment under daily load. Express billings reflected a profound wartime tradition when Amerians in droves went to movies every week to enjoy a double feature, a cartoon, a "short," and newsreels. All such films were dispatched on complex and demanding schedules, bouncing along in the cars, heading for theaters, large and small up and down the line. Passenger revenue (ticket, mail, express) rose nicely from a dismal $16,690 in fiscal 1940 to $89,771 in 1945. A modest change in operation occurred during the summer of 1940 when street running ended at Fort Dodge, a small passenger area carved out of the freight station and a loop track installed at the end of private right-of-way. **10**

It might have seemed absolutely counterintuitive but passenger earnings clearly outpaced freight during the war years—not in absolute dollars but in percent of growth. Freight receipts were $835,867 for fiscal 1940, hit $1,173,691 for 1943,

Above: Northbound and southbound cars pass at Boone. Would the country slip back into depression after war prosperity? *Railway Age* did not think so.



Above: Passengers wait patiently at Fort Dodge to board car 62, train 8, on August 31, 1947. At left is Chicago Great Western's Minneapolis-Omaha train 31, gliding out of town after a brief stop at that road's station on the east end of Central Avenue. *John F. Humiston photograph.*



Above: FtDDM&S no longer had the steady hand of Clyde H. Crooks at the tiller. Crooks for four decades had overseen the property from his office on the second floor of the company's depot at Boone. *William F. Armstrong photograph.*

but dropped to $919,468 in 1945. Tons handled actually dropped from 980,624 in 1940 to 685,106 in 1945. FDL handled little traffic bearing directly on the war effort and relied, as always, on outbound building materials (gypsum products, brick and tile), but housing starts during the 1930s had been depressed, and that pattern continued drearily onward throughout the war years. The bright spot, the only one, was in the agricultural sector where volume turned up smartly during the war, yielding 190,077 tons in 1943 by example. The company's service area was, of course, one of the most productive of agriculture in the state and its farmers took full advantage of positive growing conditions which, unlike the "dirty 30s;" turned marvelously favorable. Bountiful crops of corn, oats, and soybeans filled elevator bins and contributed to the government's "Food for Freedom" program as well as FDL's financial fortunes. Less-than-carload receipts, which might have been expected to escalate because over the road truckers were obliged to cope with rationing and shortage of drivers, stayed surprisingly flat. Billings of gasoline and oil dropped precipitously due to restrictions. [11]

A smile must have crept across the face of the usually stern Clyde Crooks as he reviewed FDL's financial performance. The road posted a net deficit after paying interest and taxes in fiscal 1943, but produced net profits in 1944 and 1945, the operating ratio dropping to a healthy 76.40 in 1943. Income from auxiliary operations—selling surplus power—had peaked in 1929 and turned downward across the 1930s and, as the Interstate Commerce Commission rightly observed, "revenues from this source vary closely with freight revenues...[because]...industries to which it sells electric power are located on the lines that produce freight." Those industries, of course, were primarily the gypsum mills near Fort Dodge which throughout the Great Depression and war years suffered from scant demand, although there was a nice uptick late in 1945. As always, the company sought to expend its franchise, gaining a few short segments in Boone, Polk, and Webster counties. [12]

Then, with astonishing suddenness, it was over. Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were followed by surrender on August 14. Official word came at the dinner hour.

Above: Car 82 rattles its way toward Fraser. *George Niles collection.*

Above: Coasting along as it nears the Des Moines terminal, No. 62 is seen in September 1939. *John F. Humiston photo; Norman Carlson collection*

"Shouting throngs" filled the streets that evening at Spencer, Storm Lake, and many other Iowa communities; businesses were shuttered the next day. At Des Moines, streetcar operators took a "four-hour holiday" to celebrate, and the governor ordered all state liquor stores closed for 36 hours. **13**

Confusion followed euphoria. An average of 10,000 men per day had been swarming into West Coast embarkation ports for transshipment to the Pacific in preparation for an invasion of Japan. Now, however, trains all over the country were shunted into sidings as officials sorted out what to do with men and material no longer necessary for war. Nobody had anticipated that it would end so quickly. Plans in the short term were ad hoc,

but gradually evolved into a generally orderly demobilization. Redeployment of units from Europe to Asia stopped, cutbacks in military procurement were followed by cancellation of contracts. Retooling of the economy from a wartime footing commenced. But demobilization and converting the economy would be a slow process against which could be heard anguished cries of "bring the boys home" and demands to immediately end price, wage, and transportation controls. [14]

Railroad companies, their owners, managers, and employees had every good reason to be proud of their energetic and collective efforts during the years of war and had reason to be at least cautiously optimistic about the future. Some, however, wondered nervously if, after war prosperity, the country would slip back into depression, and others pointedly recalled the sharp recession in the early 1920s following the Great War. There was reason for sober reflection and analysis. The years 1939-1945 brought spectacular increases in railway revenues but net operating income for the industry before interest and taxes in 1945 was 23.2 per cent less than 1944. And at the end of 1945 the nation's carriers were hauling freight at general rates no higher than in 1941 despite wage increases of 28 per cent over the same period. A writer for *Railway Age* pointed out that "railroad prosperity depends on national prosperity and a high rate of productivity." While concerned by uncertainty "due to transition from war to peace," by the possibility of "labor disputes and by prevailing and threatened government policy," *Age* nevertheless was essentially upbeat "because of the increase in population, and of the enormous accumulation of unsatisfied needs during the depression and the war." To be sure, the nation had "the most extreme shortage of housing in history—shortages of houses, of apartments, of hotels—due to lack of building for a decade and a half, millions are without homes and many thousands can hardly find lodging on necessary business trips." Moreover, "there are shortages of everything—shirts, washing machines, candy, paper, printing capacity, furniture; whatever you desire, whether for personal or business purposes." Against this "there are huge amounts of purchasing power accumulated during the war in the hands of both the consuming public and of business." In

***Right:** Boardings plummeted after the war but FDL schedules remained unchanged: four round trips daily.*

Fort Dodge, Des Moines, & Southern Railway Company

FORT DODGE
Tel. Walnut 1232
Walnut 3701

THE FORT DODGE LINE

DES MOINES
Telephone:
4-0317

FORT DODGE—BOONE—DES MOINES

Corrected to January 1, 1946

SOUTH BOUND

Miles	STATIONS	No. 2 Daily	No. 4 Daily	No. 6 Daily	No. 8 Daily
		am	am	pm	pm
.0	Lv. **Fort Dodge** ------	7:00	10:00	1:00	4:00
4.8	Lv. Shady Oak ------	f7:12	f10:12	f1:12	f4:12
6.8	Lv. Roberts ---------	f7:19	f10:19	f1:19	f4:19
10.9	Lv. Lundgren -------	f7:25	f10:25	f1:25	f4:25
13.8	Lv. Palm Grove -----	f7:30	f10:30	f1:30	f4:30
18.1	Lv. Harcourt -------	7:36	10:36	1:36	4:36
22.0	Lv. Hope ----------	7:41	10:41	1:41	4:41
26.1	Lv. Boxholm -------	7:47	10:47	1:47	4:47
31.1	Lv. Wolf ----------	7:57	10:57	1:57	4:57
34.2	Lv. Fraser ----------	8:05	11:05	2:05	5:05
42.4	Ar. **Boone** ----------	8:25	11:25	2:25	5:25
	Lv. **Boone** ----------	8:30	11:30	2:30	5:30
48.0	Lv. Ericson ---------	f8:40	f11:40	f2:40	f5:40
53.3	Lv. Napier ---------	f8:48	f11:48	f2:48	f5:48
56.4	Lv. Kelley ---------	8:55	11:55	2:55	5:55
59.9	Lv. Midvale ---------	f9:00	f12:00	f3:00	f6:00
62.3	Lv. Huxley ---------	9:06	12:06	3:06	6:06
67.3	Lv. Alleman --------	9:14	12:14	3:14	6:14
73.5	Lv. Ankeny --------	9:24	12:24	3:24	6:24
75.6	Lv. Oralabor --------	f9:28	f12:28	f3:28	f6:28
79.2	Lv. Swanwood ------	f9:33	f12:33	f3:33	f6:33
84.8	Ar. **East Des Moines** -	9:50	12:50	3:50	6:50
	E. Seventh & Court	am	pm	pm	pm

f. Denotes flag stop.

DES MOINES—BOONE—FORT DODGE

NORTH BOUND

Miles	STATIONS	No. 1 Daily	No. 3 Daily	No. 5 Daily	No. 7 Daily
	E. Seventh & Court	am	am	pm	pm
.0	Lv. **East Des Moines** -	7:00	10:05	1:05	4:05
5.6	Lv. Swanwood ------	f7:12	f10:17	f1:17	f4:17
9.2	Lv. Oralabor --------	f7:17	f10:22	f1:22	f4:22
11.3	Lv. Ankeny --------	7:22	10:27	1:27	4:27
17.5	Lv. Alleman --------	7:31	10:36	1:36	4:36
22.5	Lv. Huxley ---------	7:38	10:43	1:43	4:43
24.9	Lv. Midvale --------	f7:43	f10:48	f1:48	f4:48
28.4	Lv. Kelley ----------	7:50	10:55	1:55	4:55
31.5	Lv. Napier ---------	f7:55	f11:00	f2:00	f5:00
36.8	Lv. Ericson ---------	f8:04	f11:09	f2:09	f5:09
42.4	Ar. **Boone** ----------	8:15	11:20	2:20	5:20
	Lv. **Boone** ----------	8:25	11:25	2:25	5:25
50.6	Lv. Fraser ---------	8:45	11:45	2:45	5:45
53.7	Lv. Wolf ----------	8:53	11:53	2:53	5:53
58.7	Lv. Boxholm --------	9:02	12:02	3:02	6:02
62.8	Lv. Hope ----------	9:08	12:08	3:08	6:08
66.7	Lv. Harcourt -------	9:13	12:13	3:13	6:13
71.0	Lv. Palm Grove -----	f9:19	f12:19	f3:19	f6:19
73.9	Lv. Lundgren -------	f9:24	f12:24	f3:24	f6:24
78.0	Lv. Roberts ---------	f9:30	f12:30	f3:30	f6:30
80.0	Lv. Shady Oak ------	f9:37	f12:37	f3:37	f6:37
84.8	Ar. **Fort Dodge** -----	9:50	12:50	3:50	6:50
		am	pm	pm	pm

f. Denotes flag stop.

STANDARD PTG. CO. BOONE, IOWA

the end, the industry's leading trade publication considered that economic conditions were favorable for "a prolonged period of high level construction, production, transportation, employment and prosperity." [15]

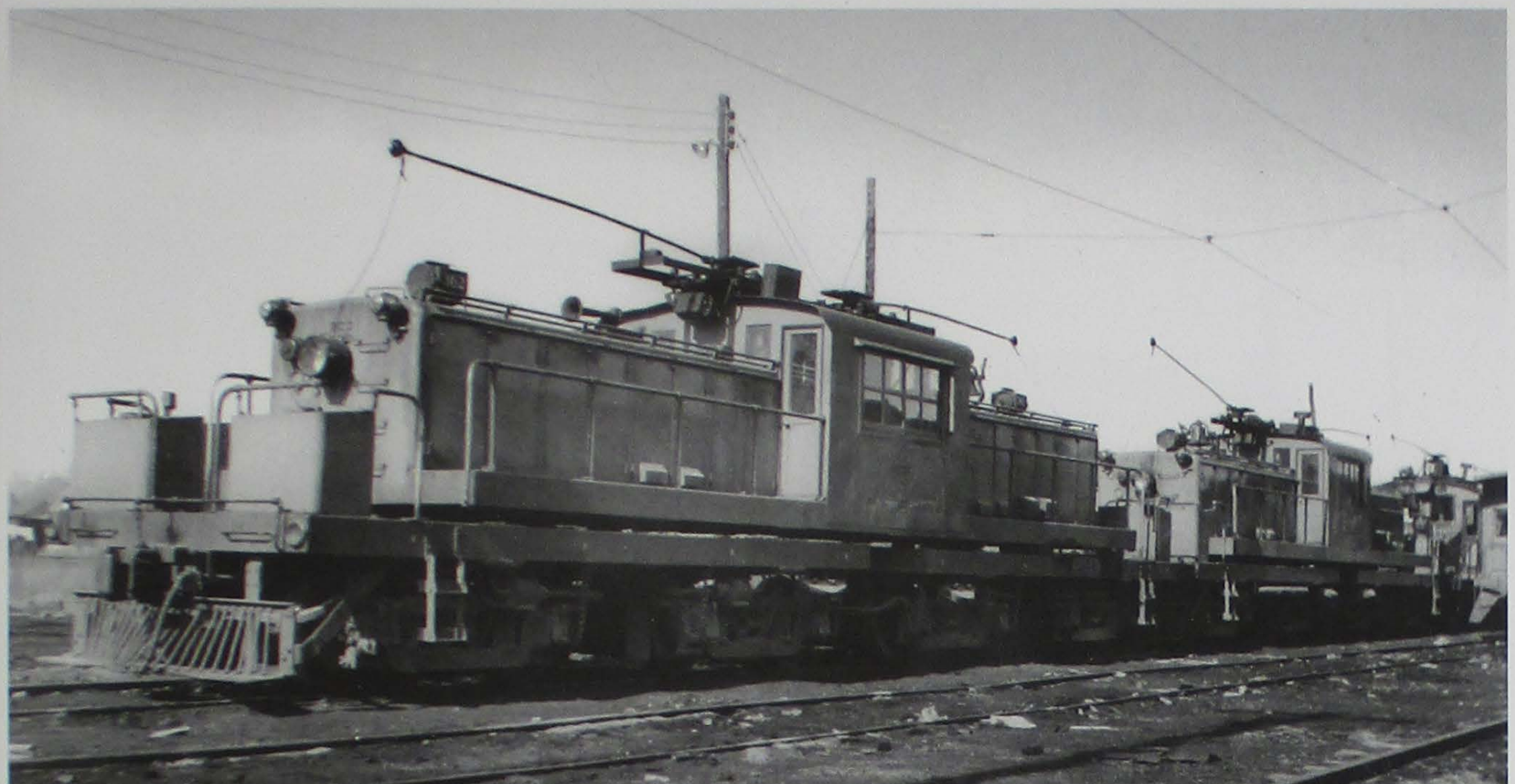
Like the industry at large, the mood at FtDDM&S was one of cautious optimism. "Our public relations continue to be pleasant," stockholders were told, and managers looked for "continued support of the citizens and industries in the community we serve and the cooperation of our employees who loyally and efficiently served our country and us through critical times." Operating revenues in 1945 were down from 1944, but "the outlook appears much brighter" for 1946 with "the upswing of the building interests, gypsum carloadings should increase." Unfortunately, the operating ratio bumped up to a frightening 99.61 in fiscal 1945, 100.02 in 1946. The future lacked clarity. [16]

Whatever the road's future, it would not have the steady hand of Clyde H. Crooks at the tiller. He had been with the company since 1907, had seen much of it built, and seen it through good times and bad, and had a deep emotional attachment to it. Employees typically called him the "old man" or the "old gent," saw him as a man of "complete self control and a will of iron," a man of firmness and a strict disciplinarian," a

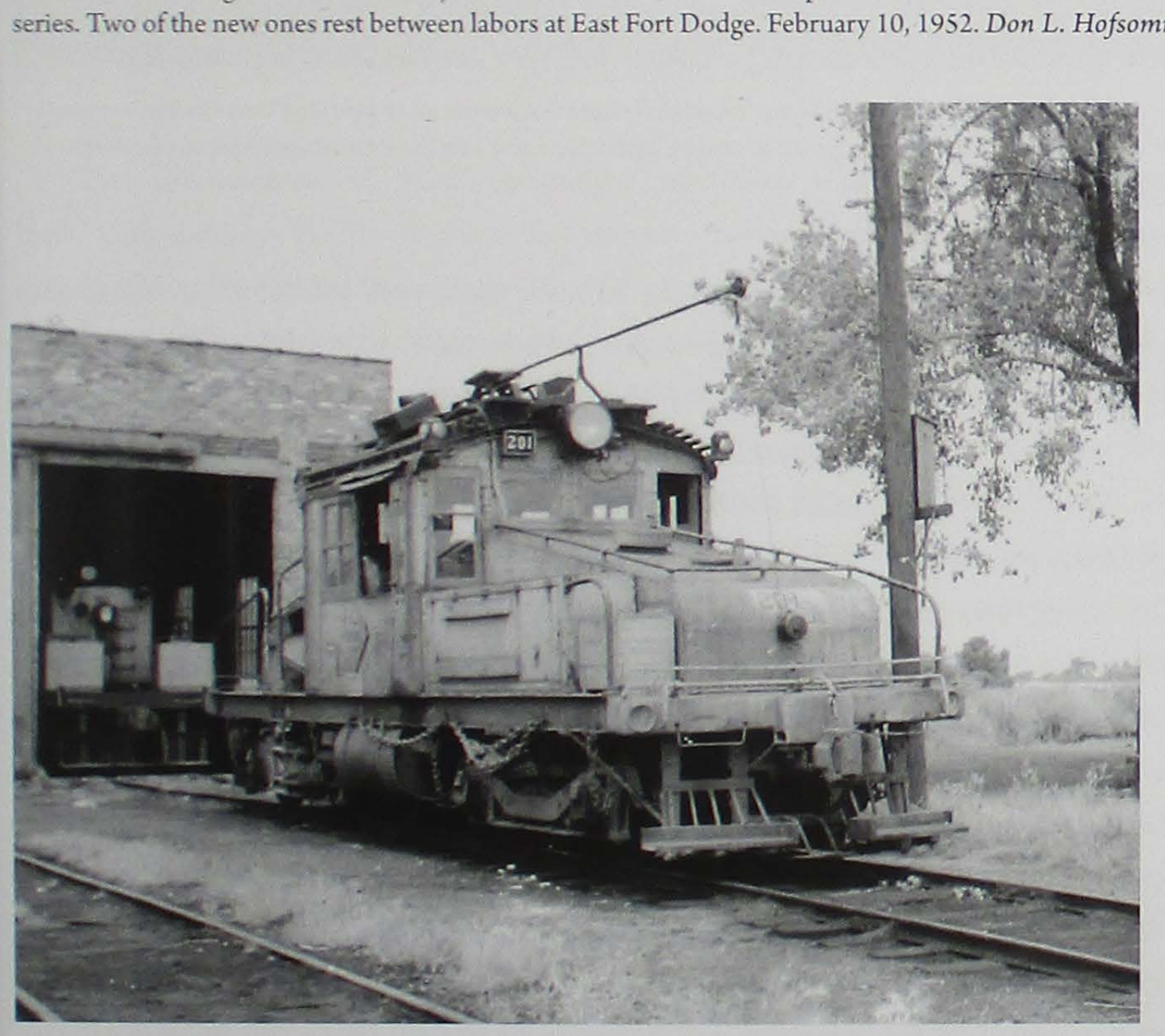
Above: Walter Dyer proudly pointed out that the company's traffic solicitors, like J. E. Renquist at Fort Dodge, actively sought new customers and were "anxious to discuss with present or prospective customers whatever problems they may have regarding freight and switching service."

man with a sly sparkle in his eye and possessing a great sense of humor, and they perceived that "under his coat of iron he had a heart of gold." The Boone *News-Republican* on January 28, 1946, reported that Crooks, age 71, had died at his home, that he "had not been in the best of health recently, but had been at his desk every day last week." Ironically, a few months earlier death had claimed the life of F. M. Johnston, with the company since 1909, and highly respected as vice president, treasurer, and auditor. Walter R. Dyer, general counsel, succeeded Crooks as president, and recalled that "both of these officers had devoted more than forty years of their life to the company, showing the utmost

Above: A freight extra juggles cars at Napier on a blustery February day in 1948. *William F. Armstrong photograph.*



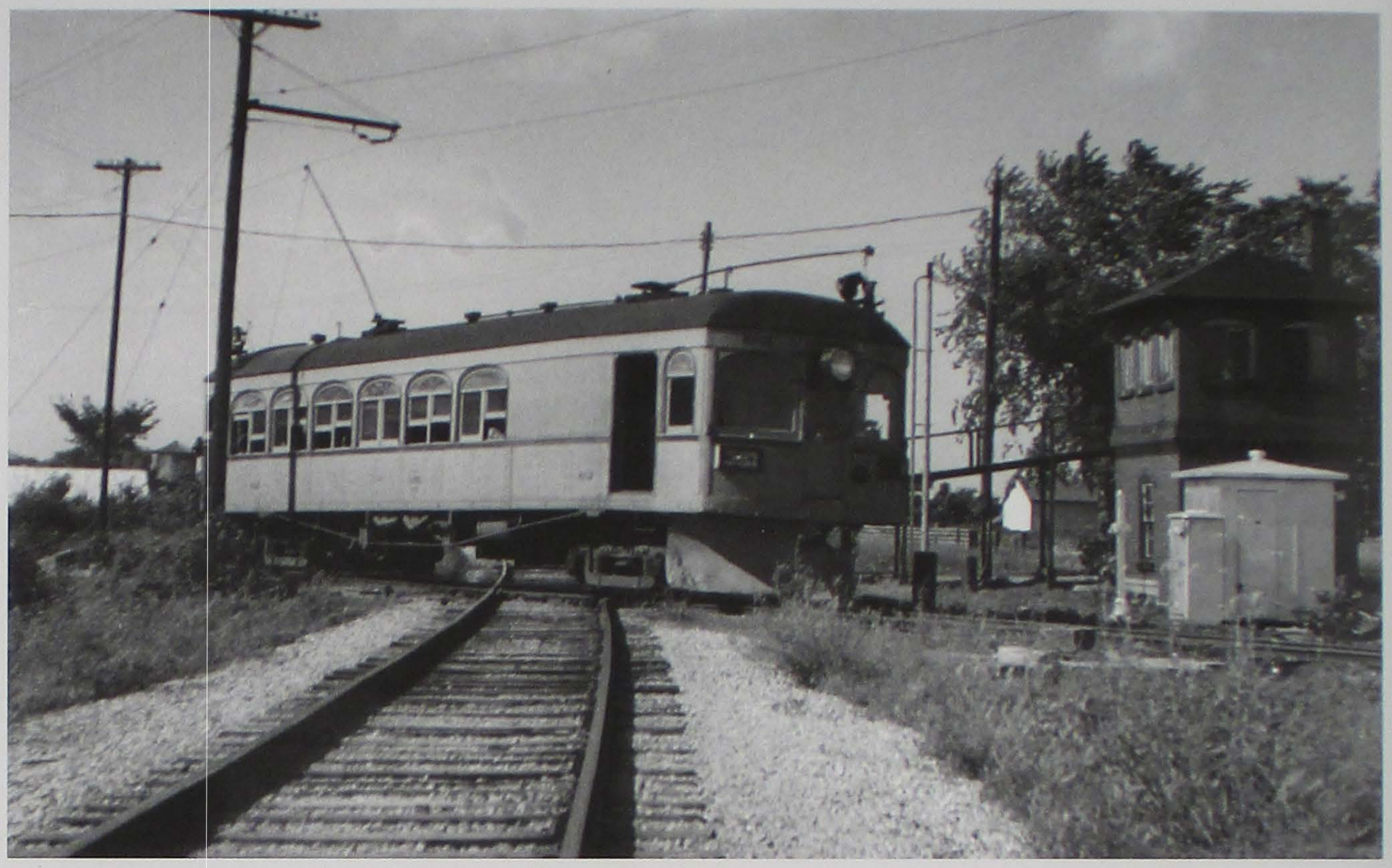
Above: When Oregon Electric Railway dieselized in 1947, FtDDM&S purchased three of its unusual four-truck freighters and numbered them in the 360 series. Two of the new ones rest between labors at East Fort Dodge. February 10, 1952. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*



Above: Boone shopmen had patched and mended the road's aging fleet of freight motors throughout the depression and war years. The giants from Oregon Electric posed some mechanical problems, but they were soon worked out.

skill, energy, and devotion to their work." The venerable and hard-crusted Clarence K. Kelly, who started with predecessor Newton & Northwestern in 1906 became vice president and general manager. [17]

The conversion from a war economy in which government expenditures used as much as half total output was surprisingly quick and featured little unemployment. The primary sparkplug was the dramatic surge in consumer demands, especially for durable goods, and residential construction, especially in the suburbs. Financing this package came from savings and war bonds, as well as accumulated profits in industry now available for expansion. Federal monies for the G.I. Bill of 1944 and Housing Acts of 1946 and 1949 likewise added fuel. 18



Above: Bell a-ringing, car 62, upbound from Des Moines clatters over the Chicago Great Western diamond--minutes away from the Fort Dodge terminal. Said Walter Dyer: "The prospects for the company must be viewed from the standpoint of railway operations and also from the standpoint of the electric power division"--they were indivisible. *Basil W. Koob photograph.*

The railroad industry reflected the broader national experience. What did the future hold? The year 1946 was not reassuring. President Harry Truman lifted price and wage controls; inflation soared.

Coal miners put a crimp in the domestic economy by striking and so did rail labor. Truman responded by taking over the railroads in the name of the government. Train and engine crews walked off the job anyway on May 24 in a strike that lasted three days. Settlements on wage issues followed, but the strike of 1946 sent a signal that relations between labor and management in the railroad industry would be tense in the postwar era. Moreover, nasty strikes in the meat packing industry and again in the coal fields would further trouble the economy and the political landscape in 1948. **19**

Fortunately, however, there were contraindicators. Housing starts nationwide in 1949 were 1,349,000, up sharply from 139,000 in the war year 1944; the result was heavy demand for construction material of all kinds. Iowa's cement plants, gypsum mills, and brick and tile manufacturers stood to profit from this as did railroads serving those plants. Lumber, mostly from the Pacific Northwest, and much of it "roller cars looking for a home," i.e., shipped from mills before sold and "billed in transit," flowed to the state in an unremitting stream. Movement of grain continued at record levels after V-J Day, stimulated in part by programs designed to assist war-ravaged Europe. That, of course, was especially critical to Iowa and its railroads. Indeed, 67.7 per cent of all Iowa billings in 1945 came from agriculture, 62.1 per cent in 1947. Corn led with 13.4 per cent in 1945, 15.7 per cent in 1947. Soybeans in 1947 replaced wheat and/or oats to claim second place in grains, processed soybean oil cake and meal adding even more carloads. Manufactured items moving by rail, too, often were related to agriculture. **20**

Throughout the war years Iowa's roadway expansion and improvement program slowed perceptibly, but the Federal Aid Act of 1944 established a national system of interstate highways and demanded that states select routes connecting principal metropolitan areas, authorizing $500 million annually for the first postwar years. And with peace the War Production Board lifted its ban on the manufacture of civilian motor vehicles. Americans predictably and enthusiastically renewed their love affair with automobiles and trucks. With tires and fuel readily available and with new and better roadways, emboldened truckers bought more and larger rigs and took up a vigorous campaign to lengthen hauls with heavier payloads. Much to the chagrin of Walter Dyer and those associated with FtDDM&S the Iowa Commerce Commission in 1946 authorized Ruan Motor Freight to operate in the Des Moines-Boone corridor, acknowledging that FDL service there had been "reasonably adequate," but noting that "Boone is one of the few cities in Iowa which does not enjoy unrestricted motor carrier service in addition to rail service." In 1949, Brady Transfer & Storage of Fort Dodge gained an even greater concession when regulators allowed it to offer competition parallel with FDL all the way from Des Moines to Fort Dodge. [21]

The circumstance of FDL's passenger operation was more problematic. The Iowa State Commerce Commission historically had protected the company from what it considered to be unwarranted bus competition and did so again in 1944 and 1946, but the real enemy was not the bus, rather the automobile. Manufacturers could not meet demand as the motoring public clamored for Ford's "All New Mercury," General Motor's Buick with "Dynaflow Drive," or the "New 1946 Nash." FtDDM&S noticed the impact as early as the fall of 1945—"the logical result of the removal of gasoline restrictions," stockholders were told. Moreover, said the company, "it is expected that the availability of new cars and tires will further reduce revenues." That prediction proved all too correct. Boardings plummeted from 100,863 in fiscal 1945 to 85,850 a year later, to 51,911 in 1949; ticket sales fell from $78,778 in fiscal 1945, to $64,822 a year later, to only $38,121 in 1949. Average fares dipped from a high of 82.5¢ in 1944 to 69.8¢ in 1949. Schedules remained unchanged, however, four round trips daily on the Fort Dodge-Des Moines run. [22]

Even as passenger volume dropped, freight picked up, tonnage rising from 685,106 in 1945 to 1,093,736. Revenue patterns followed a similar path, rising from $906,061 in 1945 to $1,917,083 in 1949. Gypsum products led all commodities as this chart shows.

CARLOAD FREIGHT RECEIVED AND FORWARDED BY YEARS

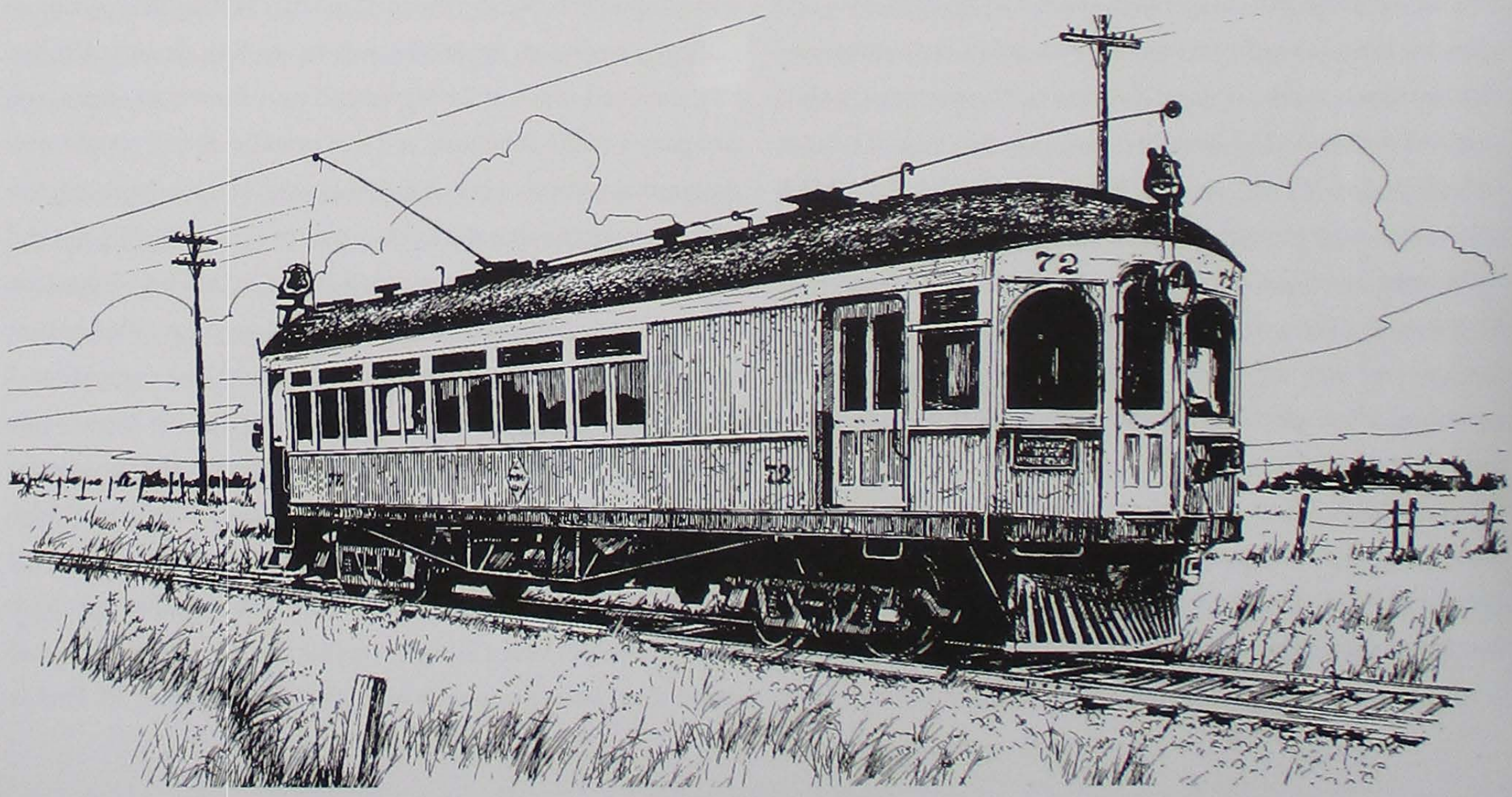
	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948
Gypsum Products	9,298	8,525	12,440	14,213	16,214
Grain	1,996	1,815	1,949	2,581	1,565
Coal and Coke	2,801	2,818	2,685	2,758	2,898
Gasoline and Oil	496	618	1,024	956	1,127
Sewer Pipe and Tile	798	960	1,219	1,587	1,785
Other Products	3,838	3,876	4,513	4,987	6,112
Total Cars of Freight	**19,227**	**18,612**	**23,830**	**27,082**	**29,701**

President Dyer forecast that demand for gypsum products would hold up due to continuing demand for building products necessary to deal "with the scarcity of dwelling units over the country as a whole," and pointed out that lading came from several plants—National Gypsum, Wasem Plaster, Cardiff Gypsum, and two served exclusively by FtDDM&S, United States Gypsum and Certainteed Products. The road also could count on significant agricultural tonnage since the market, domestic and foreign alike, remained strong. Coal volume remained steady—much of it moving to the Fraser generating plant, some to the Iowa State College campus at Ames, the rest to on-line dealers. On-line pits remained active at Lundgren and near Fraser. As always, the company's traffic solicitors, as Dyer proudly noted, sought new customers and were "anxious to discuss with present or prospective customers whatever problems they may have regarding freight and switching service." And, Dyer added, "because the Fort Dodge Line is a 'short line' railroad, we feel that we can know the problems of our customers more intimately than can our trunk line competitors." FDL assiduously cultivated positive relations with those same steam roads, depending on them for car supply, and arranging for all nature of interline movements—crushed stone to Fort Dodge from a community served by Chicago & North Western through interchange at Harcourt, plaster and stucco to Chariton, Iowa via Des Moines and Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, sand and gravel from Boone to points on Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul &

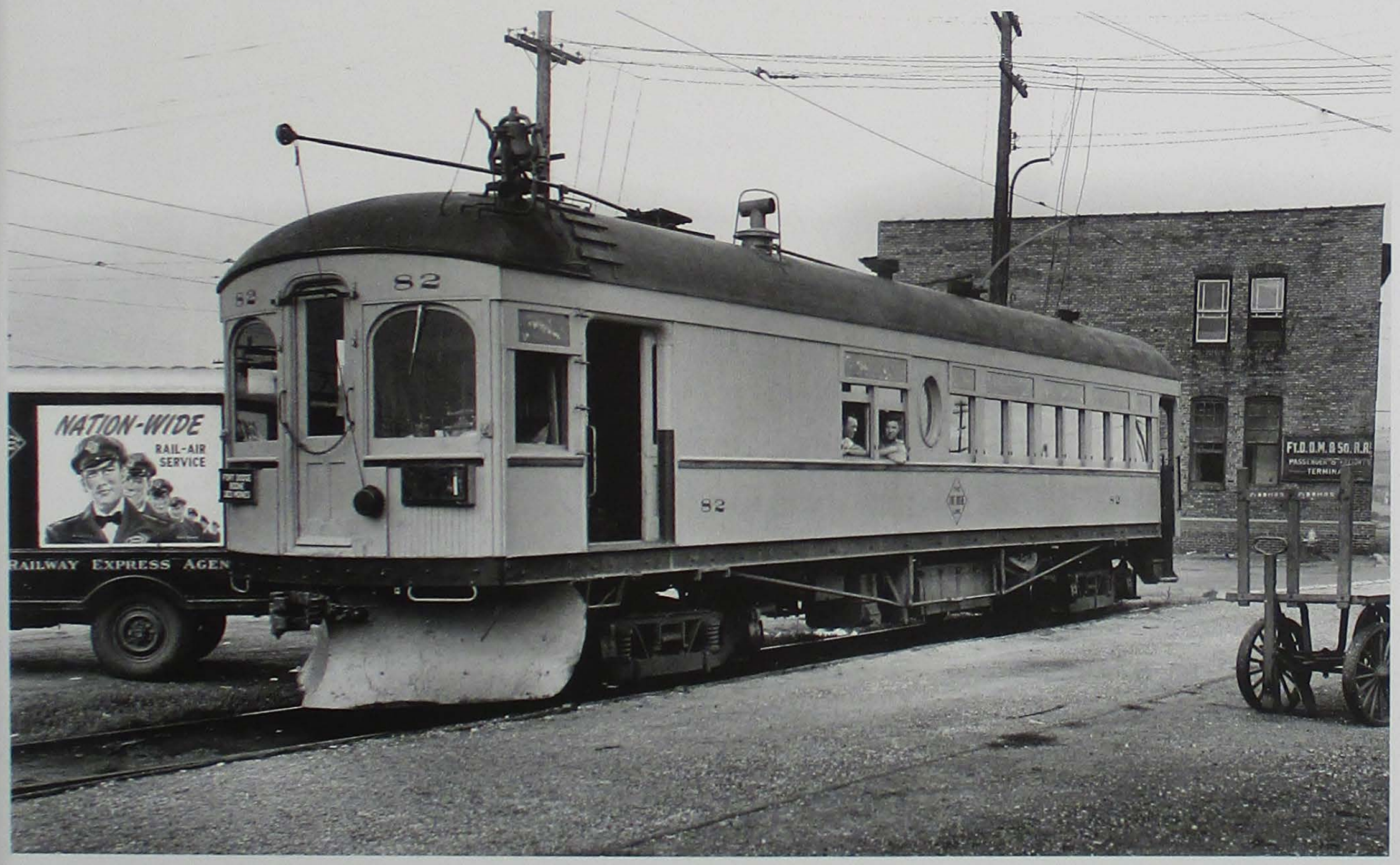
Pacific via Rockwell City, and plaster to Estherville, Iowa by way of Gowrie and Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific as a few examples. During this time FDL typically originated three times tonnage compared to shipments it terminated making it a very attractive friend for the larger steam roads which predictably courted favor with FDL and its shippers by making joint rates and supplying a generous flow of empty cars to be returned with loads. [23]

FDL regularly scheduled two daily freight trains each direction over the main line, one on the Webster City-Lehigh and Rockwell City branches, as needed to Ames. This put a huge strain on the road's aging fleet of freight motors that Boone shopmen patched and mended when money was scarce during the depression and during the war when parts were hard to come by. When Oregon Electric Railway dieselized in 1947, FtDDM&S purchased three of its unusual husky 16-wheel, four-truck freighters and numbered them in the 360 series. They proved to be headaches until regeared but then fully met their expected potential, handling twice the tonnage of older steeplecabs. [24]

Walter R. Dyer early in 1949 struck an upbeat chord when he told shareholders that "the company in 1948 handled more freight and produced and sold more electricity than ever before in its 35-year history," and "that for the first time since the company was reorganized operating results were sufficient to provide a full four per cent interest" on its bonds. Dyer was greatly concerned, however, by urgent needs to upgrade the Fraser power plant. All but one boiler was old and needed to "be retired in the not too distant future" and replaced with those capable of providing high pressure steam. Money also would be required for "a new addition" as well as "appurtenant facilities." The matter, he said, was "particularly urgent" and it would be expensive. Dyer noted that he expected future "increase in demands for electricity from all types of customers...domestic users and municipalities...[and]...gypsum mills"—two of which planned to "further enlarge their capacities." In fact, he pointedly reminded, 65 per cent of electricity generated at Fraser was sold, the rest, of course, used to power FDL trains. Dyer also announced that a contract had been made with "Peoples Natural Gas for a supply of gas on an interruptible basis" which would mitigate the escalating price of coal and would "reduce the cost of generating electricity and increase generating capacity." Under rules prescribed by the interstate Commerce Commission the power division was treated as an auxiliary operation, but power generated at Fraser was considered a railroad activity—the railroad billing the power division for the amount sold plus thirty per cent. Finally, Walter Dyer was at pains to underscore one very stark reality: "The prospects for the company must be viewed from the standpoint of railway operations and also from the standpoint of the electric power division"—they were indivisible. [25]



Above: On January 1, 1938, FDL cut its Des Moines terminal back to this unprepossessing location at the foot of Capitol Hill. A car lays over at the new terminal on September 23, 1939. *John F. Humiston photo; Norman Carlson collection*



Above: A couple of hearty souls are on hand at the Des Moines terminal to await the early morning departure of Train No. 1, due to depart at 7:10 a.m. *Anthony F. Krisak photo; Richard A. Krisak collection*

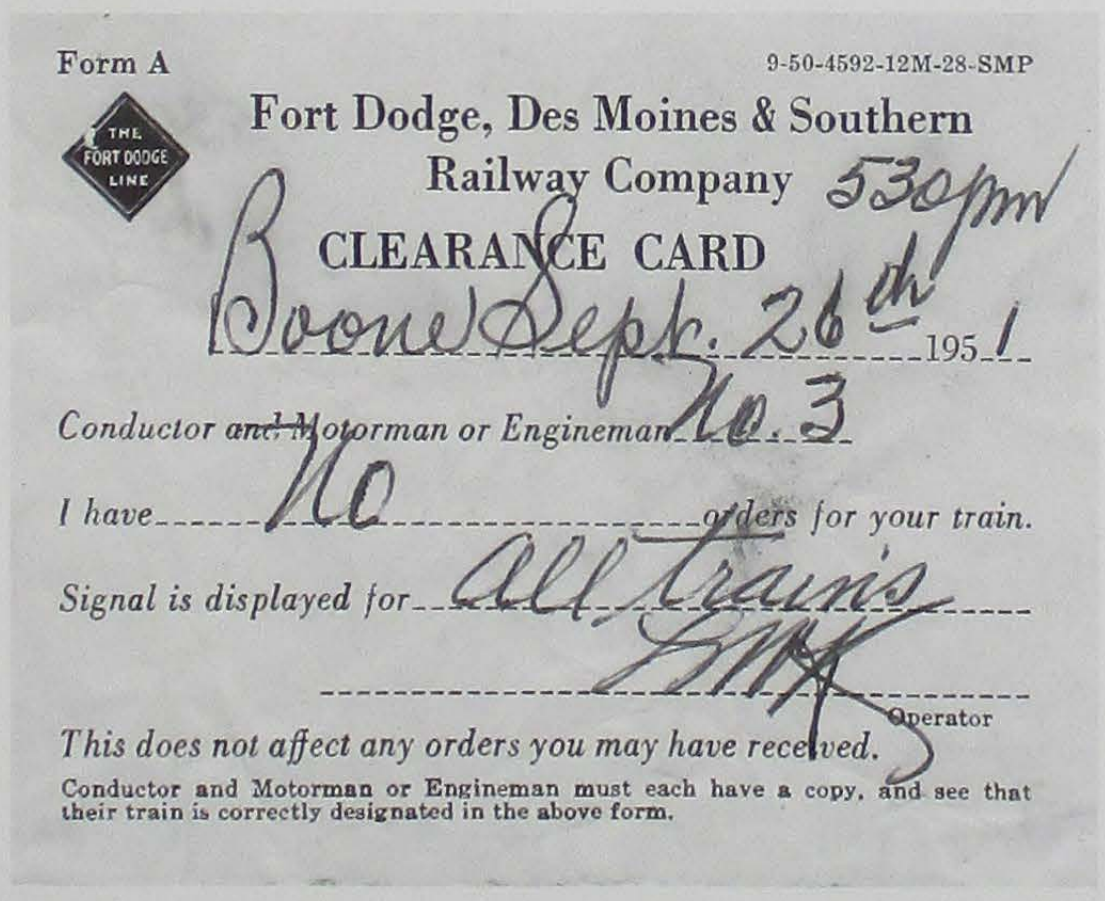

74
74
2

11

Bittersweet

From the end of World War II until the 1960s the United States economy was the envy of the world. Conversion to peacetime production proved less difficult than expected. Runaway inflation did not occur; by 1950, consumer prices were only a third higher than 1945 levels, real income per capita was about 1945 numbers, and the gross national product was higher than it had been at the end of the war. The economy stumbled briefly in 1949, but it was a blip. By early 1950 the economy was recovering and the outbreak of the Korean Conflict further accelerated expansion. Cessession of hostilities in the summer of 1953 predictably resulted in diminished military expenditures and without offsetting investment expenditures the economy entered its second postwar recession—mild, but unemployment climbed to 5.5 per cent. Demand for farm products, domestic and foreign, continued high, slumping only after the end of the conflict in Korea. Farm output accelerated nevertheless, even as prices slid. Commodity Credit Corporation (the federal government price support program) inventories rose from $1.3 billion in 1952 to $5.8 billion in 1954. The building trades, to no surprise, reflected the general business cycle. **1**

Heavy freight always was the bread and butter for Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. Small wonder that all who were associated with it brooded over Iowa's ever expanding system of roadways. Trucks, admittedly, often provided faster and more flexible service at lower rates—particularly in short haul and medium distance competition. Although the issue was sharply debated, truckers benefited greatly from publicly owned and maintained roadways for which they paid only marginal portions. And while regulated under the Motor Carrier Act, restrictions on truckers were never as onerous as for railroads. Regulated intercity truckers tripled vehicle miles and more than doubled tonnage carried in the brief period 1945 through 1953, handling 6.5 per cent of all intercity ton miles in 1945, but about 17 per cent by 1953. *Moody's* in 1950 acknowledged "the gradual gain of motor transportation," but cautiously concluded that "railroads by far handle the bulk of the movement." Indeed, railroads in 1948 produced 61.9 per cent of



Form A 9-50-4592-12M-28-SMP

THE FORT DODGE LINE

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Company

CLEARANCE CARD

530 pm

Boone Dept. 26th 1951

Conductor and Motorman or Engineman No. 3

I have No *orders for your train.*

Signal is displayed for all trains

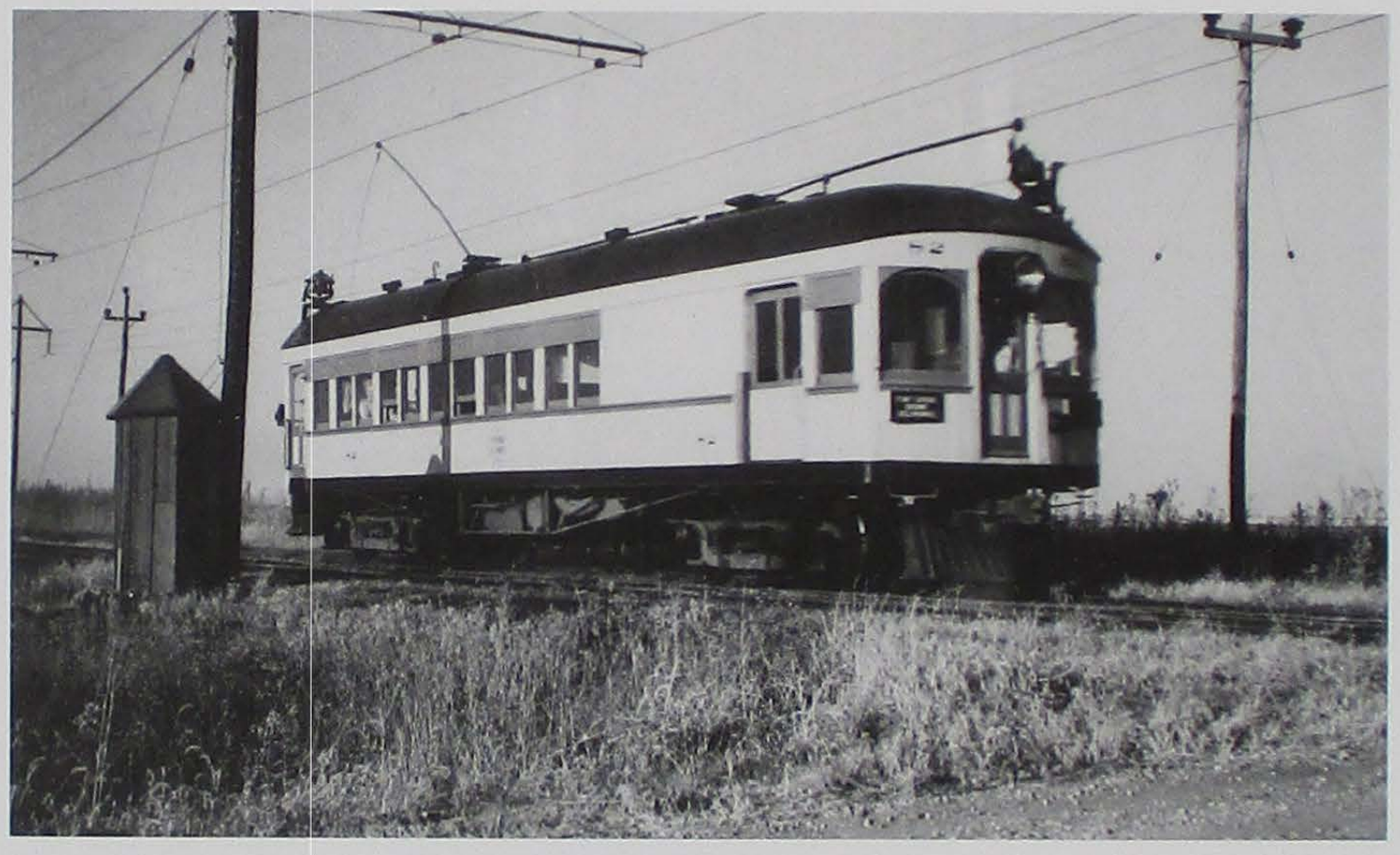
Operator

This does not affect any orders you may have received.

Conductor and Motorman or Engineman must each have a copy, and see that their train is correctly designated in the above form.

Above: The beautiful operator's script on this clearance card from 1951 might be understood as a metaphor for all good things pertaining to Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern.

Above: Box motor 205 has the daylight assignment at East Fort Dodge, building an outbound freight train. Note wallboard on the bulkhead flat--billing from a nearby gypsum plant. February 10, 1952. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*



Above: Passenger numbers for the nation's railways continued to erode. FDL was not immune. Car 82 scurries southbound at Summit. *Basil W. Koob photograph.*

ton miles among all forms of freight transport, but that dropped to a depressing 49.5 per cent in 1954. Passenger numbers likewise deteriorated. "Railroads in 1954 experienced much more severe declines in the level of their operations and earnings than did most other industries," *Moody's* blandly observed. "Ton miles were off 9.3%, operating revenues 12.1%, and net income 25.4%." [2]

Observers and analysts pondered the state of the nation's carriers in the face of declining passenger and freight revenues even as labor demanded and got wage and benefit increases, and as the companies sputtered that they were unable to pass along costs unless they received rate increases from politically sensitive, dilatory, and very often tone-deaf regulatory agencies. Net operating income for the nation's railways during the first five months of 1947 had been one-third less than the five months in 1929. Freight volumes were heavy, to be sure, but net profit was increasingly hard to come by—and market share was eroding. Chicago & North Western's Rowland L. Williams said that the country's railroads were "starving to death in a business boom." Williams blamed wrongheaded public policy, and there was much to his argument, but railroads had long since become a "mature industry," often ossified in tradition, worshipping frequently and ardently at the altar of "this is the way we have always done it." Railroad labor and its leadership tended to be equally hidebound; the long-standing "us versus them" mentality of labor and management militated against joint efforts to meet modal competition and common threats. [3]

Much of the industry's distress was historic, the war years and immediate postwar boom confusing patterns long in place. From the turn of the century through 1920, freight tonnage and collective revenues had advanced more rapidly than the country's general business activity. Thereafter, however, rail tonnage and revenues continued to rise in absolute numbers, but declined compared to industrial production. For example, the Federal Reserve Board index of industrial production rose from 90 in 1925 to 200 in 1950,

Above: The train order signal at Gowrie is clear, and there are no cars in the yard--a scene too often repeated, sad to say.

but tonnage originated on Class I railroads increased during those same years by a mere 8.6 per cent. A bright spot for the industry was rapid dieselization which markedly increased operating efficiency between 1945 and 1952 with gross tons per freight train hour increased by one-third. Yet wage rates more than doubled from 1939 to 1949. The same was true of costs for fuel, supplies, and taxes. And in 1949 non-operating employees shifted from a six-day workweek of 48 hours to a five-day, 40-hour workweek with no loss of pay. Rate increases authorized by regulators, as always, lagged behind escalated costs and now, more than ever, rate increases risked loss of business to other modes of transport. Operating costs absorbed more and more of gross revenue; net earnings declined accordingly. "Dim future depresses rail stocks," intoned *Business Week* late in 1953. Indeed, several Wall Street analysts and other observers were pessimistic about the rail industry. [4]

Iowa's electric railroads particularly were at risk in the postwar environment, their short distance passenger carriage immediately susceptible to automobile competition. Those losses alone made the very companies financially fragile. These statistics from the Iowa interurban roads make the point.

Year	Passenger Count	Passenger Revenue
1946	943,721	$1,098,229
1947	290,354	$ 312,853

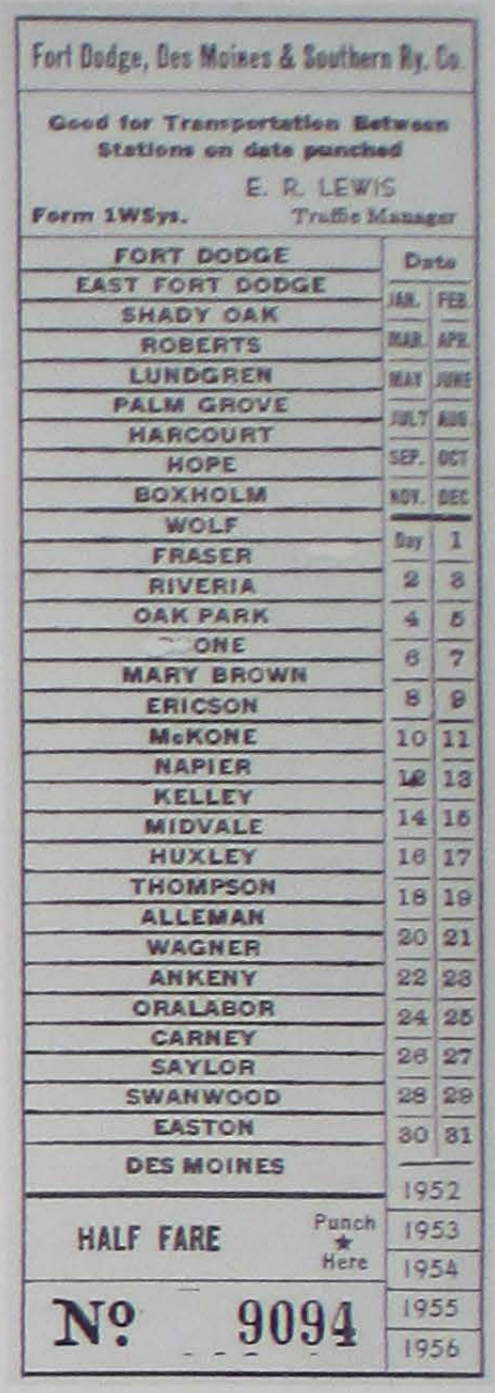
Luckily, however, freight tonnage moved up, although increased freight revenue, 1947 over 1946, barely covered losses in passenger income. [5]

Des Moines & Central Iowa profited as much by the war as any Iowa electric road, primarily because it alone served Camp Dodge, and DM&CI likely suffered more than any other in the postwar years. Its passenger count told the story. In 1941, 36,876 patrons boarded its cars, a whopping 276,187 in 1943, but only 74,861 in 1945, and 55,571 in 1947. A two-car "farewell run" to Perry ended DM&CI's passenger service on September 28, 1949. Fortunately the road had important freight customers at Des Moines, although it had few elsewhere. Colfax and Woodward branches were jettisoned in 1946. [6]

The story was more or less the same everywhere. Tiny 3.5-mile Tama & Toledo, once an electric road, threw in the towel on January 31, 1953. "Truck competition killed the line," said D. W. Wells of Toledo, a manager for Iowa Power & Light, owner since 1912. Elsewhere, Charles City Western had a contract to handle mail to Rock Island at Marble Rock, but when annual losses from passenger operation reached $10,000 CCW pulled the plug on that segment of its business. But the road enjoyed substantial billings to and from Oliver Implement, Dr. Salsbury's Laboratories, Iowa Public Service, and numerous grain elevators

and lumber yards adequate to support electric locomotives in road service and diesels at Oliver and Salsbury plants. Nearby Mason City & Clear Lake had ended passenger operation on August 30, 1936, but like Charles City Western prospered with heavy freight business from an on-line pipeline tank farm, a creamery, Mason City Brick & Tile, a stock yard, and considerable interline switching among steam railroads at Mason City. Across the state to the south, Southern Iowa Railway—successor to Centerville, Albia & Southern—like Mason City & Clear Lake had dropped passenger service in the 1930s when the depression made it unprofitable. Freight volume remained strong, however, although the line from Moravia to Albia was cast off on April 16, 1948. [7]

Cedar Rapids & Iowa City in 1939 had purchased used but modem passenger cars from Cincinnati & Lake Erie which had ceased operation. The "new" cars tended to roll at high speed—65 miles per hour and higher were not unknown—giving rise to the following saying, "swing and sway the Crandic way." Not equipped for multiple-unit operation, the cars provided yeoman service during World War II, earning $573,707 in 1945. Three years later the road still scheduled 13 trains between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City, but revenue was down to $452,000 and falling. The Mount Vernon Branch had been abandoned in 1928, and on Memorial Day in 1953, Crandic vacated the passenger carrying trade. It was done with class—a Crandic hallmark. Six cars, operating as six sections of the same train, handled 300 passengers including United States Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper and Crandic President Sutherland Dows—$1.61 round trip, reserved seats only, thank you. A band greeted the cars upon arrival at Iowa City and played "Auld Land Syne" at departure. "Fast Freight Service Now Our Full-Time Job," declared Crandic and, in fact, volumes were impressive. But in a few months that important business was handled by diesel locomotives. [8]


Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Ry. Co.

Good for Transportation Between Stations on date punched

E. R. LEWIS
Traffic Manager

Form 1WSys.

FORT DODGE
EAST FORT DODGE
SHADY OAK
ROBERTS
LUNDGREN
PALM GROVE
HARCOURT
HOPE
BOXHOLM
WOLF
FRASER
RIVERIA
OAK PARK
ONE
MARY BROWN
ERICSON
McKONE
NAPIER
KELLEY
MIDVALE
HUXLEY
THOMPSON
ALLEMAN
WAGNER
ANKENY
ORALABOR
CARNEY
SAYLOR
SWANWOOD
EASTON
DES MOINES

Date

JAN. FEB.
MAR. APR.
MAY JUNE
JULY AUG
SEP. OCT
NOV. DEC

Day 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

1952 1953 1954 1955 1956

HALF FARE Punch ★ Here

No. 9094

Above: FtDDM&S agents sold fewer and fewer tickets such as this one from Fraser to Boone.

Above: Car 82, train 4, grinds up the grade out of the Des Moines River Valley south of Fort Dodge. Customers are scarce. *Basil W. Koob photograph.*

Above: Locomotive 119 with a short consist meets No. 62 at Fraser on November 3, 1951. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: The two daily trips in later years were more than adequate to accommodate the handful of remaining passengers.

Muscular Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern clearly was a victim of bad luck. On October 31, 1954, a devastating fire roared through the road's Waterloo shops, destroying two marvelous open platform passenger cars, four freight motors, and invaluable machinery and stores. WCF&N was left with only one passenger car to protect service to Waverly and Cedar Rapids, one streetcar for the Cedar Falls run, and a handful of motors for freight and switching duties. Like other roads, WCF&N was hard hit by motor vehicle competition and, predictably, the end came for the passenger run to Waverly early in August 1955 and to Cedar Rapids on February 19, 1956. WCF&N served major industries including Rath Packing and Deere & Company at Waterloo and freight revenues had remained strong until 1952 when a prolonged steel strike shut down the Deere plant and deprived WCF&N of lucrative revenue. The loss of coal business and inroads by truck competition likewise cut traffic volumes. Independent ownership passed on July 1, 1956, when property and franchise were purchased jointly by Illinois Central and Rock Island. Restyled as Waterloo Railroad, dieselization followed. The end of electrified operation came on March 31, 1957, except for the line to Cedar

Above: Freight revenues rose smartly—producing a very satisfactory $2.4 million for 1953. The yard scene at Des Moines reflected as much. *George Niles photograph.*

Above: The dispatcher has arranged a meet at Hope for train 1, car 72, and southbound Extra 362 with 23 cars of mixed freight. *William D. Middleton photograph.*

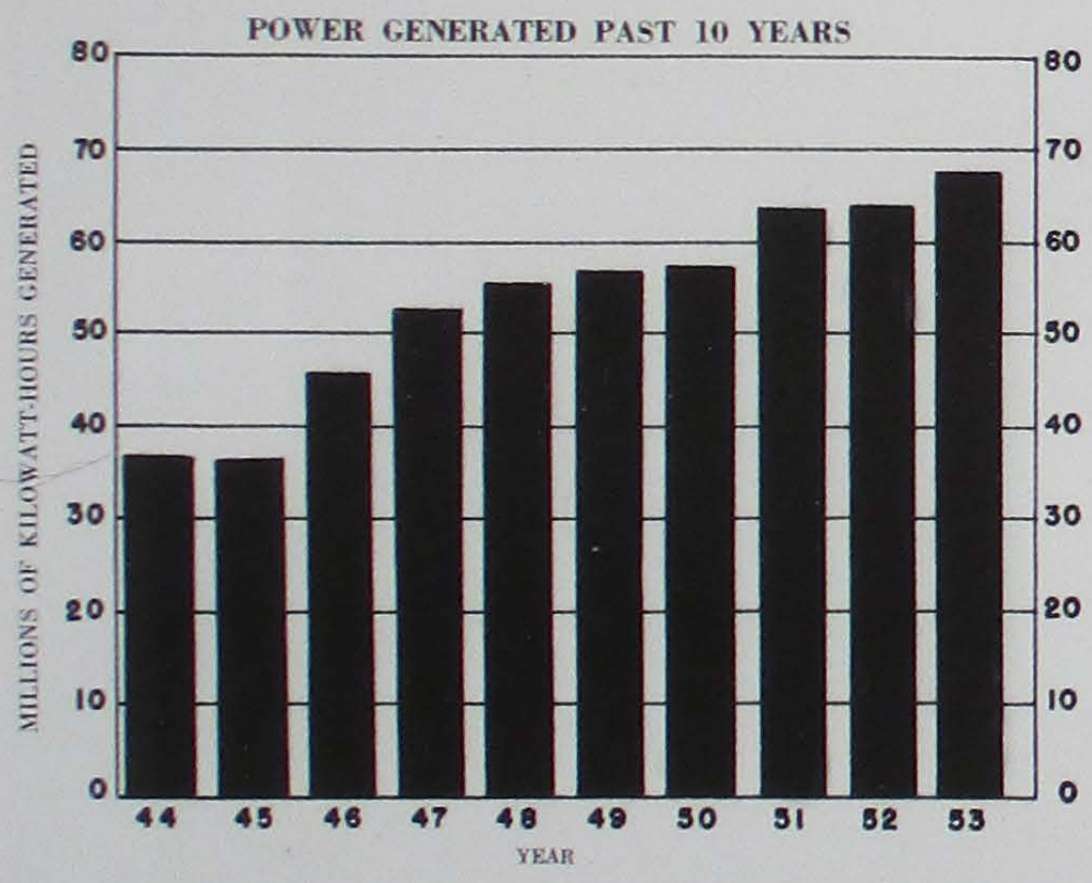
Falls, and trolley wire there came down shortly after the final streetcar run on August 1, 1958. The end came, too, for the Waverly Branch, which perished on October 1, 1959. [9]

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, Iowa's largest interurban in terms of route miles, faced the same problems as the others. Revenue passengers dropped from 33,877 in 1950 to 18,205 in 1952; ticket sales in the same years fell from $24,845 to $14,799. Effective July 9, 1950, operation was trimmed to twice daily round trips. "This proved to be more than adequate for the number of persons using this means of transportation," shareholders were told. Losses thus were "kept to a minimum." State regulators agreed. "The private automobile and bus combined with the network of improved all-weather highways... have wrought a revolution in transportation within the past 25 years and has resulted in the transfer of a larger portion of passenger transportation needs and services from the local passenger train to the highway." So said Iowa Commerce Commissioners. "Expenses... have very substantially increased...[and]...losses are of major consequence." What of the public's interest? "This Commission is fully aware that the discontinuance of train schedules will discommode some people, more particularly those living near the line in farm territory. However, no transportation company can be expected to continue an operation indefinitely when that operation is continued at a loss." [10]

Above: National Gypsum near Fort Dodge offered a pleasant flow of business for FtDDM&S.

Freight presented a much brighter picture—121,570 carloads handled in the four-year period 1950-1953. Gypsum products led with over 60 per cent of total, grain, coal, and clay products trailing in order. Revenue derived from handling freight coupled with switching charges produced a very satisfactory $2,377,865 for 1953. With additional sources (tickets, mail, express, demurrage, incidental) total railway operating revenue was $2,590,943. [11]

Auxiliary revenue, as always, derived from selling excess power—net operating earnings of $219,194 for the three-year span 1951-1953. Power generated at Fraser had risen every year from 1945 and there was every reason to think that growth trend would continue. Television station WOI of Iowa State College at Ames, for instance, was a new customer. But improvements at Fraser seemed an annual routine—new switchboards and wiring, new high pressure boiler, new water treatment plant, and new deep well on the list for 1952. That was not the end of it. In December 1953, work began on the reconditioning of one boiler and converting it to be fueled by oil and gas—oil for standby, gas entirely for summer months. Tonnage in coal used to fire boilers had gone up, of course, as demand for electricity increased, but coal mined in Boone County, often burned at Fraser, decreased from 110,126 tons in 1944 to only 23,620 tons in 1950, to 6,000 tons in 1953, none thereafter. This meant that coal was required from "foreign sources," off-line and perhaps out of state, and consequently more expensive. Even a modest shift to oil and gas meant reduced tonnage in coal handled to the plant by the railroad itself. And, as always, a tight symbiotic relationship existed between the railroad and its Fraser generating station. The percentage of power generated at the place and used by the railroad varied over the years, but in the period 1950-1953 ranged from 26.3 to 35.0. [12]



Above: As always, there was a tight symbiotic relationship between the railroad and its Fraser generating plant.

Above: Arthur P. Wheelock was an outsider but a friend of several FDL shareholders in Des Moines. His imprint on the company was immediate.

A hallmark tradition in senior management of FtDDD&S from the beginning was loyalty, longevity, and promotion from within. Walter H. Dyer, for example, had succeeded long-serving Clyde Crooks as president. A graduate of Boone High School and holder of a law degree from the State University of Iowa, Dyer began his career as an attorney at Boone before joining FDL as claim agent in 1910. He served on the local school board for eighteen years (fifteen as president), was a director of numerous civic organizations, and was well known throughout Iowa and the Midwest in legal and railway circles. Death claimed the well-built, handsome, and self-confident Dyer on July 14, 1952. He was succeeded by Arthur P. Wheelock, an outsider but a friend of several stockholders in Des Moines. [13]

For FtDDM&S, Wheelock was a distinct anomoly. Born in Wausau, Wisconsin, in 1894, the family moved to Moline, Illinois, where he attended the public schools—proving to be anything but a stellar student although he kept teachers and librarians busy tracking down books and articles on railroading, "something they could never understand." Wheelock aspired to a railroad career, but his parents insisted instead that he seek "a formal education." He did, reluctantly, earning a Doctor of Ocular Science degree and then practiced a short time as an optometrist. Along the way he invented several instruments, secured patents on them, and earned a comfortable living. Yet he lived and breathed railroading. That led him to Missouri and the abandoned Cassville & Exeter, a five-mile pike that he resuscitated and turned into a profitable enterprise. His success in the Ozarks led friends to have him elected to the FDL board and then the company's secretary. With the death of Walter Dyer he was named executive vice president "until a new president was selected. That new president was Arthur P. Wheelock. [14]

Wheelock's imprint on the property was immediate. In his view, railroads should be managed "like any other business." For him that meant donning work clothes and riding locomotives and cabooses, learning and tweaking the operation. Most of all, however, Wheelock was an energetic and effective cheerleader and salesman. He initiated a cleanup, fix-up, paint-up policy designed to engender pride in property on the part of customers and employees alike. Moreover, he understood that pride in the company's built environment was linked

Above: Wheelock embraced a cleanup, fixup, and paint up policy designed to engender pride in property on the part of customers and employees alike. Boone, summer 1953. *William F. Armstrong photographs.*

Above: For Wheelock, safety was a paramount issue and one tightly connected to employee morale. Workers in the Boone shop pamper one of the road's aging freight motors. *William D. Middleton photograph.*

Above: Fort Dodge Line operations centered around Boone where the main shops were located as well as motive power for the freight trains.

Above: A large grain elevator went up at trackside at Rockwell City.

to positive employee morale and safe practice. The safety issue stood in bold relief for all hands the result of a nasty accident at Rinard, on the Rockwell City branch, when an FDL crew failed to comply with rules governing the interlocker, took their train over the crossing only to have it sliced in two by an onrushing Chicago Great Western freighter that had right of way. The result was acute embarrassment, considerable damage, although fortunately no loss of life. The incident cost FDL $146,444.93 plus court costs and interest—a heavy burden. A routine of safety meetings followed across the system; a new safety manual was produced; an in-house newspaper was introduced; and an annual employees' picnic was established. Wheelock missed no opportunity to speak to civic organizations and he saw to it that display advertisements were placed in on-line newspapers and in *Traffic World*. He also pledged FDL to active membership in the Association of American Railroads and in the American Short Line Railroad Association. Another innovation came in the form of a "Santa-On-Rails" event when the company at Christmastime provided a Santa Claus (well supplied with candy and trinkets) who traveled by special train over the railroad to bring seasonal cheer to youngsters along the line. He also changed the company's historic identification from Fort Dodge Line to Fort Dodge-Des Moines Line to remind that the road did "a large business in and out of Des Moines" and because he thought, Fort Dodge Line implied that it was nothing more than a "switching road." All of it was done with charm and flourish. Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, said Wheelock, was the "best damn railroad in the world... keep your eye on us...we're going places." **15**

Above: Diesels came to FtDDM&S but Wheelock cautioned: "Our thought is not to fully dieselize since it would lower our powerhouse efficiency during the night when the load is low." Freight motors, caboose, and rolling stock doze at East Seventh and Court, within sight of the Iowa state capitol building in Des Moines. *William D. Middleton photograph.*

Bravado? Yes. But Arthur Wheelock was no flimflam man. Shippers paid attention. Gamble Robinson, a wholesale grocery firm, located a $400,000 warehouse on FDL in Des Moines, a large grain elevator went up at trackside in Rockwell City, other grain handlers added capacity, and the road attracted a number of new small industries. And Wheelock was determined to run the railroad with greater efficiency. Agency service had been eliminated earlier at Huxley and Hope and there remained little "low hanging fruit." But Wheelock was not afraid to spend money to effect efficiency. That was reflected when FDL spent $1,168,768.65 to take ownership of 200 PS-1 boxcars manufactured to Pullman-Standard financed mostly by an equipment trust and, since the federal government ruled that this equipment was "necessary to the defense of the United States," it could be depreciated by "70% of the cost" over five years. Wheelock then turned his attention to the physical plant—replacing bridges, rebuilding street crossings, inserting ties and applying tie plates, clearing weeds and brush, and implementing a project of gradually replacing aging 70-pound rail with 90-pound. [16]

Above: A touch of elegance--APW7, a former Pullman observation car that Wheelock used to woo customers and cultivate public good will. "Keep your eye on us...we're going places."

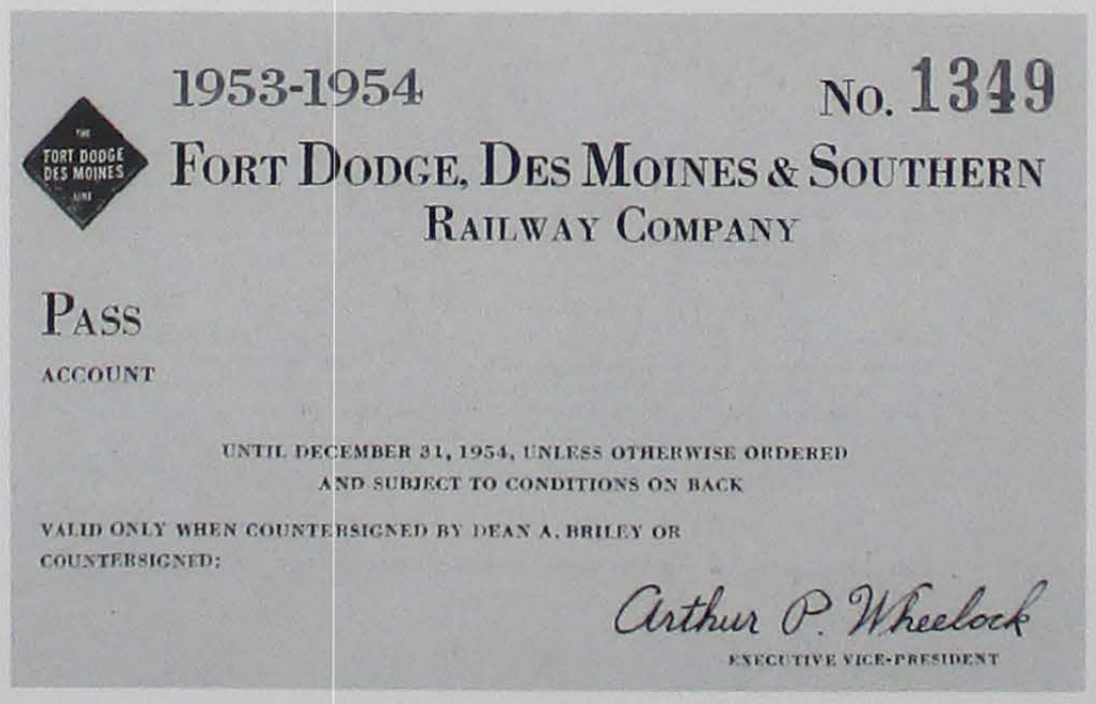
Wheelock also announced that the road in December 1953 had taken delivery of a new diesel-electric locomotive to "augment our switching operations in Fort Dodge" and to take over train operations on the Webster City-Lehigh branch. He underscored that the company had "switching contracts" (with gypsum mills) that "we must protect," and this could be accomplished with the diesel unit "in case of a failure of our electrical power" and to "help out when the electric peak load is on." The experiment was a grand success and two more units—like the first, 70-ton, 600-horsepower, from General Electric—were put on order. When delivered, this would allow the company to "remove the trolley, poles, and some substantions...cut our maintenance costs and selling of the scrap material will help us substantially in the payment of the new diesels." Wheelock cautioned, however, that "our thought is not to fully dieselize since it would lower our powerhouse efficiency during the night when the load is low. In other words, the power used for the engines at night can practically be termed increment." As always, the railroad and its power plant were inseparable." [17]

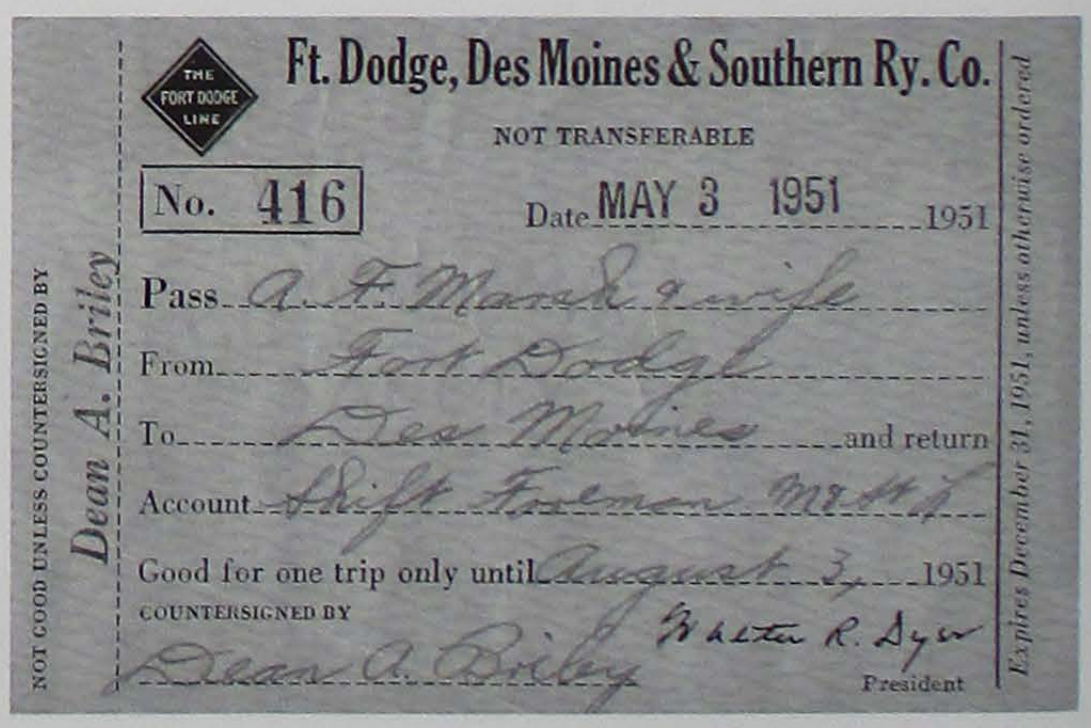
In the public's eye, the "interurban" always connoted passenger service, but FtDDM&S was down to only two daily trips and in 1951 Walter Dyer had said: "Our principal reason for continuing daily passenger trains is to transport company employees between terminals." Nevertheless, the company kept the cars in good shape, clean and painted. When Wheelock came to the Presidency he said he planned to "retain passenger service, at least for the time being," feeling that it was "a good will medium and serves as an advertisement for the company." The routine remained prosaic with little out of the ordinary. An exception occurred, however, in the summer of 1953 when Al Roberts, a future executive at Iowa's famous Maytag Company, proposed marriage to the young woman he was courting while they awaited arrival of the southbound car at Hope. She accepted. Special trains from Des Moines to the YMCA camp five miles north of Boone were a tradition and a tradition among youngsters on those trains was to fill white cone-shaped paper cups with water from coolers and then drop them from open windows to float downward into the Des Moines River valley like little parachutes. Special charters were especially welcome. On July 26, 1953, Iowa Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society sponsored a three-car trip over all line segments above Boone (140 passengers), and

Above (Both): Special trains from Des Moines to the YMCA Camp north of Boone were a tradition. An August trip in 1946 required two cars—82 and 74. Loading at Des Moines and, with white flags flying, rolling out of town. *George Niles photographs.*

Above: On July 26, 1953, Iowa Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society sponsored a gala trip over all lines above Boone. A stop at Harcourt, where FDL crossed a C&NW branch, passengers detrained to examine the property and to take pictures. *Don L. Hofsommer photographs.*

Above: The Special made a stop at Lehigh, whose station had not seen a passenger train in many a year. *Don L. Hofsommer photographs.*





Above and Bottom Left: Harcourt (top) was another stop for excursionists on July 26, 1953. Vernie G. Hofsommer had the catbird seat as Extra 62 prepared to depart from Lehigh. *Don L. Hofsommer photographs.*

on May 16, 1954 the Boone "Y" Camera Club chartered two cars for 74 passengers on a trip from Boone to Ames and then to Fort Dodge and return. FtDDM&S, as was its custom, proved an accommodating host. Ticket sales were stable if paltry—$14,799 in 1952, $14,521 in 1953. [18]

Wheelock leaned back in his chair, smiled, and reflected on a very good 1953—major operating economies and improvements and a solid financial performance adequate to meet depreciation schedules and pay all expenses including taxes, interest, and even a modest dividend on common stock. "By continuing this program we can look forward to...having one of the best short line railroads in the country," predicted an ebullient Arthur P. Wheelock. [19]

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For Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, the year 1954 was, as Charles Dickens put it in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "the best of times, the worst of times, the season of Light...the season of Darkness...the spring of hope...the winter of despair...." Said Arthur

Above: Car 82, up from Des Moines, makes its morning arrival at Fort Dodge. FDL was that city's "hometown interurban," and under the marvelous leadership of Arthur P. Wheelock, the road's "continued progress is assured" predicted the *Messenger*. *Basil W. Koob photograph*

Right: Alfred P. Butts was in charge of train 3 on Sunday June 20; it proved to be his last trip as a passenger conductor.

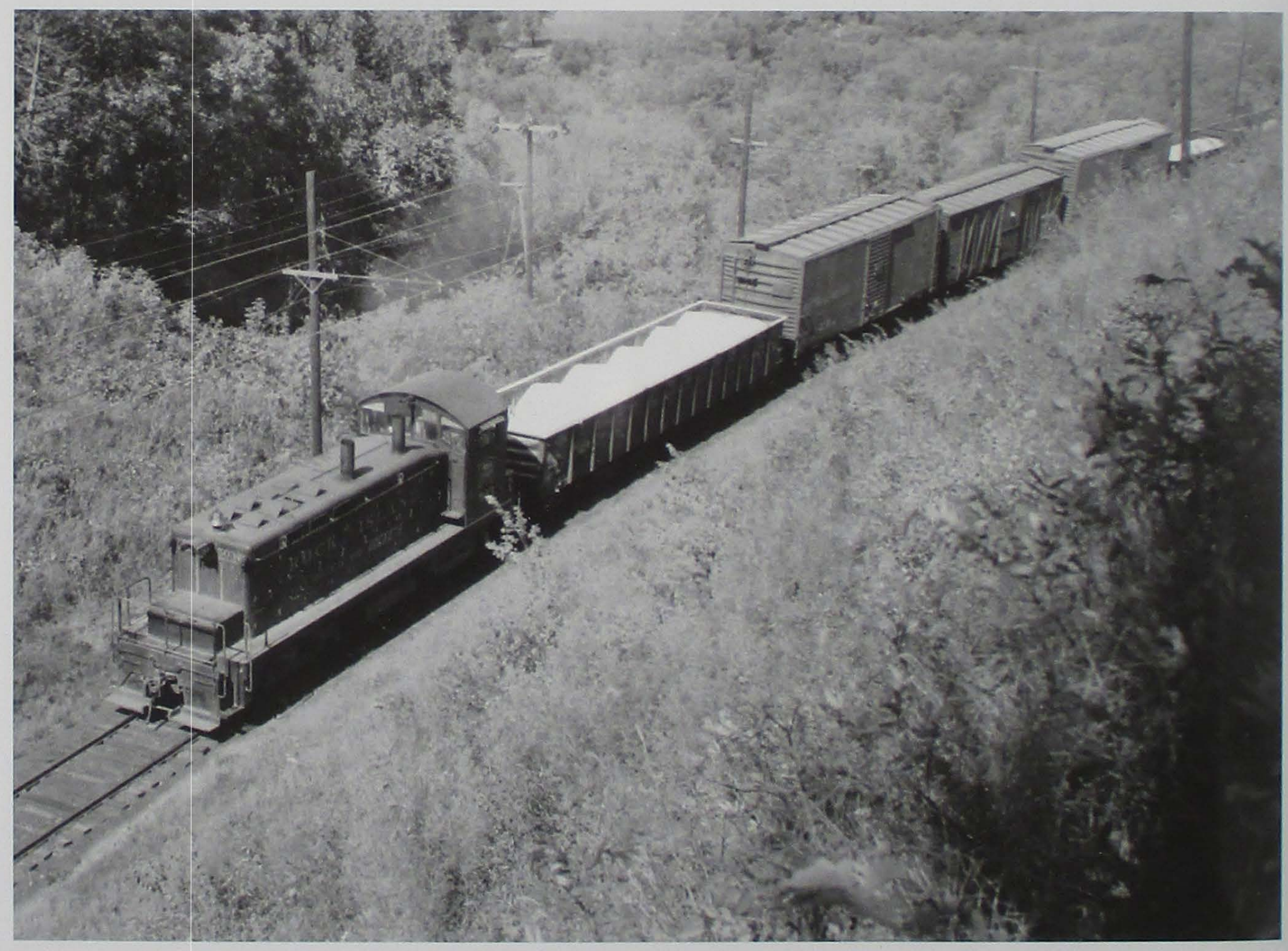
Wheelock: "The first five months of operation in 1954 indicated a net improvement in operating results, compared with the previous year, of $124,609.43." *Modern Railroads* caught the pleasant scent of Wheelock's innovative ways in April with a lengthy story extolling "the revitalized Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern." A few weeks later *Railway Progress* produced a similarly glowing report. On June 17, the *Fort Dodge Messenger* ran an expansive article on the history of the city's "hometown interurban," concluding that "under the stewardship of Arthur P. Wheelock... continued progress is assured" and confidently predicted that the company would "continue to be an important factor in providing the heart of Iowa with modern and efficient service." But the gods deplore and punish hubris. Disaster struck. [20]

On Friday, June 18, 5.85 inches of rain fell at Algona, on the East Fork of the Des Moines River above Fort Dodge. The same storm poured down on the Boone River watershed. Flooding on the Boone was quickly predicted at Webster City and for Fort Dodge on the Des Moines. Saturday brought even more rain. Sunday brought a deluge of 5.63 inches at Fort Dodge, 7.40 inches between Fraser and Boone. A crisis was at hand. Train number 3, upbound from Des Moines, did not reach Fort Dodge until 11:35 p.m. on Sunday, but only after a perilous journey over water-covered rail and through heavy downpours and at one point near Fraser obliging passengers to deboard and walk ahead over a thoroughly watersoaked and spongy fill, the car and its thoroughly frightened motorman gingerly following. (The fill then collapsed.) By Monday washouts were epidemic: one near Ankeny, three between Boone and Fraser, two south of Fort Dodge. Boone braced "for the worst flood in history." Fraser was the hardest hit place in Boone County—by Tuesday reached only by boat. Despite heroic efforts there was no saving the power plant—water rushing in to cover the condenser and other machinery. Electric switches were pulled, steam valves closed, and water quickly extinguished fire under the boilers. Giant turbines went quiet. By Monday evening eight feet of water stood above the floor in the power house. "Untold damage was done to the...power plant at Fraser" was the understated estimate of the *Boone News-Republican*. Indeed, the catastrophe was complete. [21]

Above: The awful flood of 1954 knocked out the power plant at Fraser and idled to road's venerable fleet of freight motors. Would they ever be recalled from their Boone slumbers? *George Niles photographs.*

Arthur Wheelock tried to put a happy face on it, but it was a struggle. He promised that power would be restored to the gypsum mills "within a day or two and, in fact, nearby competitors—Iowa Electric Light & Power and Iowa-Illinois Gas & Electric—did supply to some and then most customers on a temporary basis. Laborers and technicians worked around the clock to reopen the Fraser plant—Wheelock hoped in a month. He shook his head in dismay, however, recalling healthy investment in recent modernization, monies now lost. Meanwhile, as it happened, the road had one of its diesels in Des Moines and the other (the third one ordered but not yet delivered) in Fort Dodge when the flood hit. Other diesels were borrowed from Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific, Minneapolis & St. Louis, and Des Moines Union. Freight service resumed on the Boone-Des Moines leg and to Ames on June 22, and over the entire main line on June 28. But it was ad hoc. Electric power

Above: As it turned out, FDL had one of its diesels in Des Moines and another at Fort Dodge when the flood hit. They were pressed into day and night service, handling switching chores, moving intercity tonnage, and work extras to repair track. *William D. Middleton photograph.*



Above: Rock Island provided a loaner, here slowly wrestling tonnage up hill from Fraser toward Boone. September 1954. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

was purchased from Des Moines Transit Company to "warm up" the trolley line to the Kelly converter and then up to Fort Dodge; eventually freight motors reappeared. Earlier FDL ran two cars out from Boone to the YMCA camp to rescue 147 stranded boys and delivered them back to Des Moines, but regular passenger operation remained in limbo. [22]

The company staggered forward. By the end of August, one of four turbines at Fraser was back on line, two more promised in a week or so, but power moved only to industrial and commercial users. Diesels, owned and borrowed, continued to move most freight—occasionally in multiple with one of FDL's big, four-truck freighters dragging surprisingly long trains. It would not be until November that main line freight trains were drawn almost exclusively by electric motors and that passenger service—a daily turn that began at Boone, went to Fort Dodge, then to Des Moines, and back to Boone—resumed operation. Wheelock said that "management faces the year 1955 with every confidence that operating results will be good for the year," and that "power production at Fraser now exceeded "all forecasts." But his face clouded over when he announced that the company had closed 1954 "with a net loss of $192,577.09, entirely due to the dislocation of operations and direct repairs required as a result of the major flood on the Des Moines River and heavy damage to the Fraser power plant." And, "due to the unsatisfactory result of 1954 operations, no interest is being paid on" the company's bonds. [23]

Was Wheelock simply a Pollyanna, a victim of unwarranted optimism in forecasting a rosy future? Certainly he took heart in looking back on 1954 and seeing that the road had handled only 3,681 fewer carloads than in 1953—really quite remarkable under the circumstance. And dry-eyed analysts projected a stable economy with continued demand for product handled to and from on-line customers. But change was coming, dramatic change. [24]

Above: FDL reinstituted passenger service in November 1954. Train number 1, car 72, heading for Des Moines, south of Boone. April 9, 1955. *William D. Middleton photograph.*

Above: It was no surprise when FtDDM&S petitioned to end passenger service. The Post Office Department had diverted mail when the road was forced to suspend service and there was no prospect of retrieving that lost revenue. Loading mail at Fort Dodge had been routine in an earlier time. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

Most observers had been surprised when FtDDM&S reinstituted passenger service on November 21, 1954 (6,720 revenue passengers for the year, 4,132 deadheads), but nobody was surprised when the company petitioned the Iowa State Commerce Commission to terminate that service and when regulators nodded in agreement. The company demonstrated that it handled an average of 3.4 revenue passengers per trip, that its average revenue per day (tickets and express) was $19.70 against unavoidable expense of $50.63. Last runs were scheduled for August 31, 1955. Twenty paying passengers boarded the final car at Fort Dodge. Most were on a "sentimental journey," but James Stanek of Moorland, who had been a loyal patron since service began in 1907, was on his way to the State Fair in Des Moines. When motorman Bert Askvig had the car out of the hilly country south of Fort Dodge and onto the prairie it "geared up to its lope-like pace—the 'trolley gallop'." Goodbyes and waves were exchanged at Roberts and Palm Grove among other places. Youngsters were especially excited at passing over the high bridge near Fraser. The *Boone News-Republican* observed that the last trip "came off without and fuss or bother." Passengers and onlookers were plentiful when the car, up from Des Moines, rolled to a stop and conductor F. E. Nunamaker put the stepbox down for a final time. There were no visible tears, but rather a more wistful atmosphere than grieving over the loss of an important means

Above: Customers were hard to come by and on this day more of them were up with the motorman than back in the passenger compartment. Car 66 rolls northward near Lundgren days before service ended on August 31, 1955. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

Above: Arthur Wheelock arranged for car 66 to run multiple shuttle trips between Kelley Junction and Ames and had his private car and one of the roads big four-truck freight motors placed on a siding for inspection near the Ames depot. *George Niles photographs.*

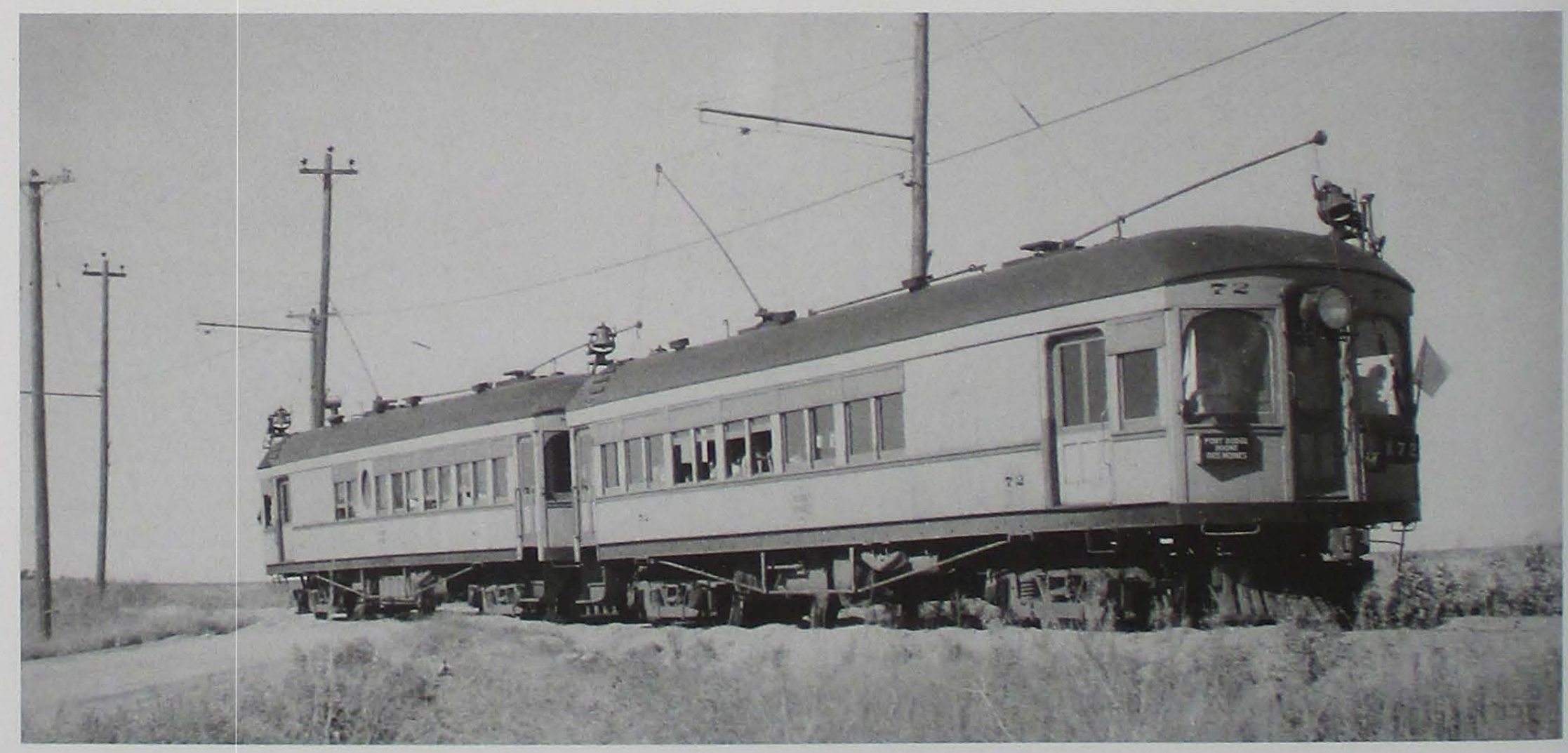
of passenger transport. As if to point up that fact, the *Fort Dodge Messenger* carried advertisements for Ozark Air Lines even as it reported on the end of FDL service. [25]

A month earlier, on July 31, the road had handled a two-car "Y Camp Special loaded to the vestibules" with youngsters from Des Moines bound for the YMCA camp north of Boone, and on the same day the ever-gracious Arthur Wheelock arranged for car 62 to run multiple shuttle trips between Kelley Junction and Ames and had his private car and one of the road's big four-truck freight motors placed on a siding near the Ames depot for inspection. Wheelock likewise consented to one final special excursion on Sunday, September 11. With that came the end. From its very beginnings Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern had depended primarily on freight for its sustenance, and really did not present itself as a "passenger interurban." Now, in 1955, as if to add an apostrophe to that reality, the respected scholar William D. Middleton passed benediction: "The interurban as an intercity passenger hauler... [has]... no future." [26]

One issue hinged on others. Certainly FDL had been motivated by the need to cut expenses when it ended passenger operation. As Wheelock noted in relief: "Our passenger train deficit has ended." But there was another motivating factor. The road's "modernization program" had led to acquisition of diesel locomotives for switching purposes at Fort Dodge and to dismantling of electric operation on the Webster City-Lehigh line (Webster City bade farewell to the

Above: All aboard! Passengers load the cars at Boone for the final excursion. September 11, 1955. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

Above: A photo stop on the "high bridge" was mandatory. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

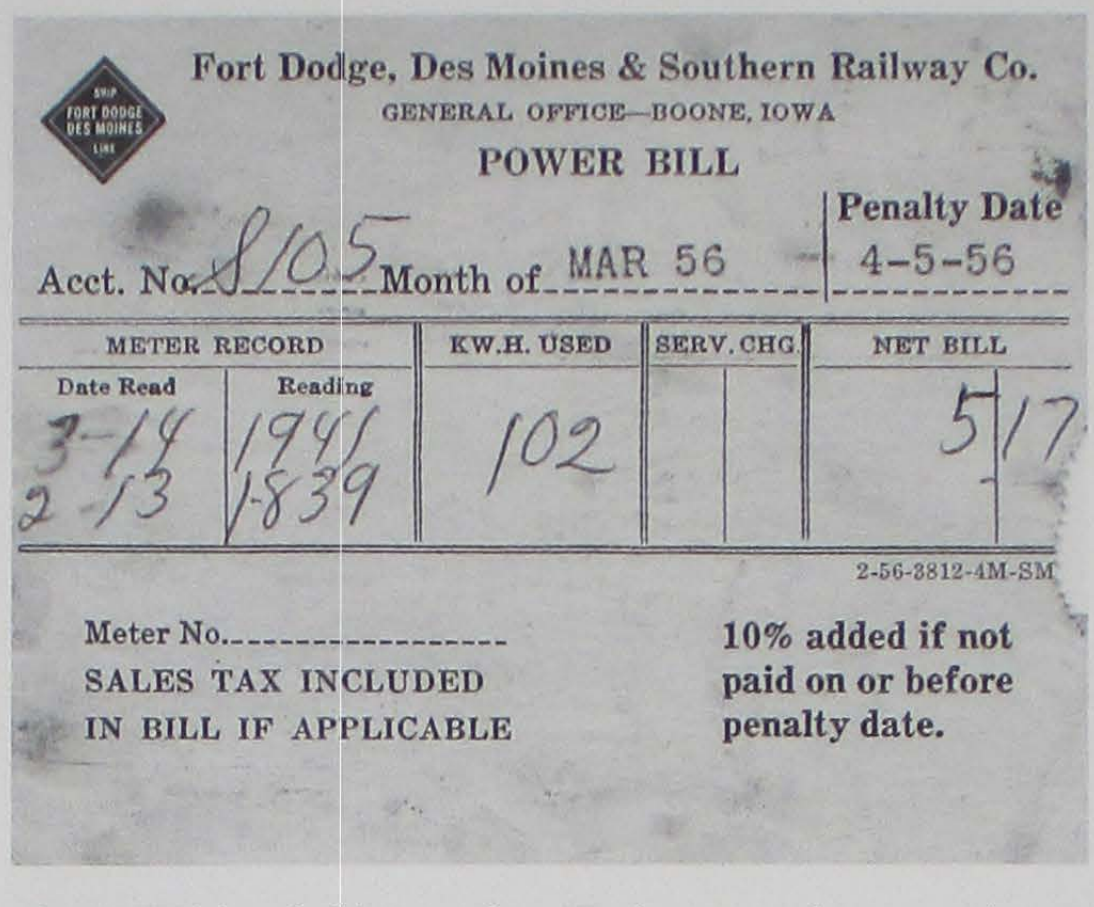


Above: Melancholy was the mood aboard the cars as they headed back to Boone on the afternoon of September 11, 1955. Near Ericson. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

Above: Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern was no longer a "steam road trolley." Boone Shops, late 1954 *George Niles photographs.*

Above: FtDDM&S would be fully dieselized--mostly with 70-ton units from General Electric. Number 403 rests between assignments at East Fort Dodge. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

"colorful 'Toonervilles'" on February 9, 1954) and then the Rockwell City branch, but a management study in 1955 "demonstrated that substantial savings could be achieved...by conversion of all trains from electrical locomotives to diesel-electric locomotive power." To that end the company ordered four more 70-ton locomotives ($84,430 per unit) from General Electric. Within twenty-four hours after the final passenger run on September 11 workmen began removing trolley wires on the main line east of the passenger depot at Boone. Wheelock blandly observed a few months later that "dieselization of railroad operations produced the economies forecast at the time the program was authorized." Iowa, William Middleton once pointed out, was the "land of the steam road trolleys," but Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern—the largest of them—no longer was a member of that now very slim fraternity. [27]



Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Co.
GENERAL OFFICE—BOONE, IOWA
POWER BILL

Penalty Date 4-5-56

Acct. No. 8105 Month of MAR 56

METER RECORD		KW.H. USED	SERV. CHG.	NET BILL
Date Read	Reading			
3-14	1941	102		5 17
2-13	1839			

2-56-3812-4M-SM

Meter No.----------
SALES TAX INCLUDED
IN BILL IF APPLICABLE

10% added if not paid on or before penalty date.

Above: FDL's board of directors determined to jettison the company's electrical generating and distribution assets.

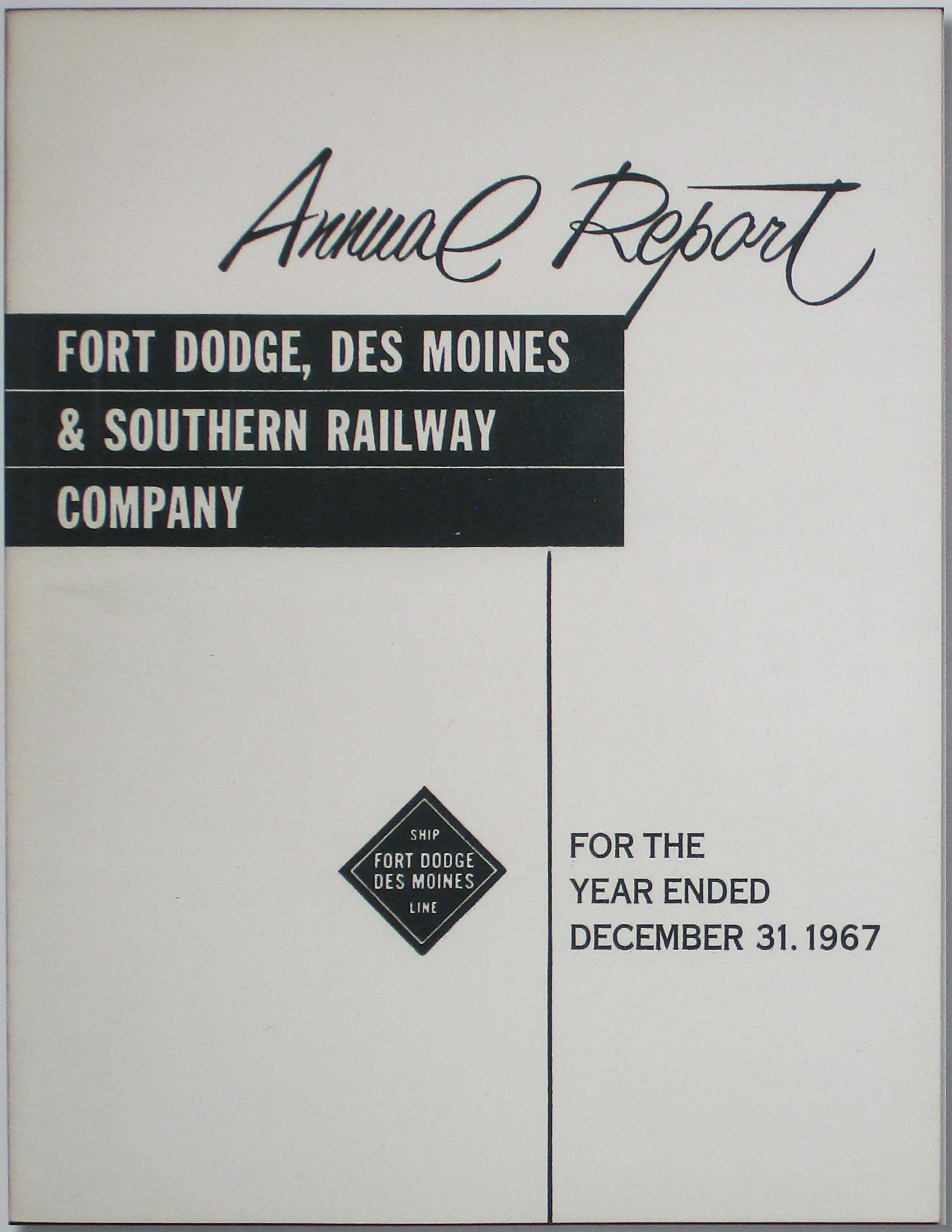
The discontinuance of passenger service and the turn to full dieselization of operation were inextricably linked to the next major development. The engineering studies that led to the railroad's conversion from electric to diesel power predictably included an analysis of the company's Fraser plant and ancillary properties and franchises. Fraser, engineers concluded, "faced in the immediate future, a very large expenditure for the installation of additional central plant generating and distribution facilities in order to keep pace with the demands of customers"—this, even after total elimination of electrified rail operation that would free up power for sale. Then, "after careful consideration of all factors," the board of directors concluded to sell "certain of its electrical producing and distribution facilities to Iowa-Illinois Gas & Electric" for $1,125,000. The Fraser plant itself would be leased out on a short term basis ending October 1, 1957, then returned to the company to be salvaged. [28]

Above: The venerable plant at Fraser had no future. Cinders in leased M&StL drop-bottom gondolas provided track ballast of uncertain quality.

Above: The now all-diesel Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern was purchased by Des Moines & Central Iowa--really Murray M. Salzberg and associates.

The coup de grace followed. "As of December 27, 1955," wrote Arthur P. Wheelock, "a substantial number of shares of the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Company common stock was purchased by the Des Moines & Central Iowa Railway Company"—all with permission of the Interstate Commerce Commission—and in as new members of the FtDDM&S board were M. P. Gross, Morris H. Snerson, and M. M. Salzberg, all of New York City. Wheelock remained as president, a director, and member of the executive committee. But it was window dressing. That, too, soon would disappear. [29]

Above: A few passengers await the northbound car at Harcourt on April 9, 1955. *William D. Middleton photograph*



Above: The Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern's last-ever annual report for the year 1967. It showed a loss. By the following year FDL would be absorbed into the Chicago & North Western. *Chicago & North Western Historical Society collection*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Valhalla

In September 1954, the Des Moines Register *featured Arthur Wheelock as one of Iowa's "business personalities" and celebrated his passion for railroading and his zest for Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. The attention made him glow with pleasure. But Wheelock revealed elsewhere that "several large trunk roads" had "tried to buy the system," saying however, that "stockholders and officers" were " so enthusiastic about the road they aren't even interested in talking price."* [1]

By now that enthusiasm had disappeared. Why? The awful flood of June 1954 which took out track and devastated the Fraser generating plant surely must have put a pucker on faces of debt and equity holders alike—especially since they had seen what appeared to be an endless need to modernize the Fraser plant. At the same time, sands in the hourglass of electric railways in Iowa and elsewhere were quickly running out. For that matter the entire railroad industry was in trouble. During 1953, American railroads handled 53 per cent of ton miles, down from 63 per cent in 1939. Freight revenues in 1954 were $7.8 billion, about what they had been in 1948; net income, however, was $683 million, essentially that of 1946. This, managers and investors complained in unison, was after railroad companies had spent lavishly to modernize plant, motive power, and rolling stock. In 1953, the return on investment for the industry was a mere 4.19 per cent; in 1954, it was only 3 per cent. Indeed, 1954 offered a glimpse into an unpromising future. Railroads in that year suffered greater declines in the level of operations and earnings than most other basic industries; ton miles were off nearly ten per cent, operating revenues dropped by more than 12 per cent, and net income plummeted by over 25 per cent. Furthermore, the decline in net income would have been greater had not much scheduled maintenance been deferred. [2]

In any event, Arthur P. Wheelock and crew were gone. As one long-serving employee put it, "after all the blood, sweat and tears by Mr. Wheelock and his fine group of officials," they were summarily cast out by new owners. The old order had been typified by Ralph L. Cooper, a graduate of Iowa State College in civil engineering, who hired on as an instrument man in 1906 and retired as chief engineer. He was elected to the Boone City Council and then served as mayor of that community. The *Boone News-Republican* hailed Cooper as a man "prominent in leadership and community activities" and one who "could count friends in the hundreds, probably thousands." New officers, by comparison, were from New York with the exception of J. C. Bussey, the on-site general manager. Directors, too, were from New York, Bussey again the lone exception. [3]

The new regime was headed by Murray M. Salzberg, son of Henry E. Salzberg, a scrap dealer who for years had gathered up bits and pieces of railroad, terminating passenger service on those lines, trimming them to their profitable parts, and salvaging the rest. Acquiring and de-electrifying interurban railways became a specialty. The elder Salzberg died in 1948, but his son carried on the tradition. In May 1949, Des Moines & Central Iowa fell into the Salzberg orbit. Final passenger runs were made on September 28, 1949, the road was soon dieselized with 70-ton General Electric locomotives, and the line trimmed back from Perry to Granger in 1953. Murray Salzberg had DM&CI purchase shares of FtDDM&S in 1954, and late in the next year the Interstate Commerce Commission gave permission for DM&CI to take control of the Fort Dodge Line. In that way, Salzberg along with

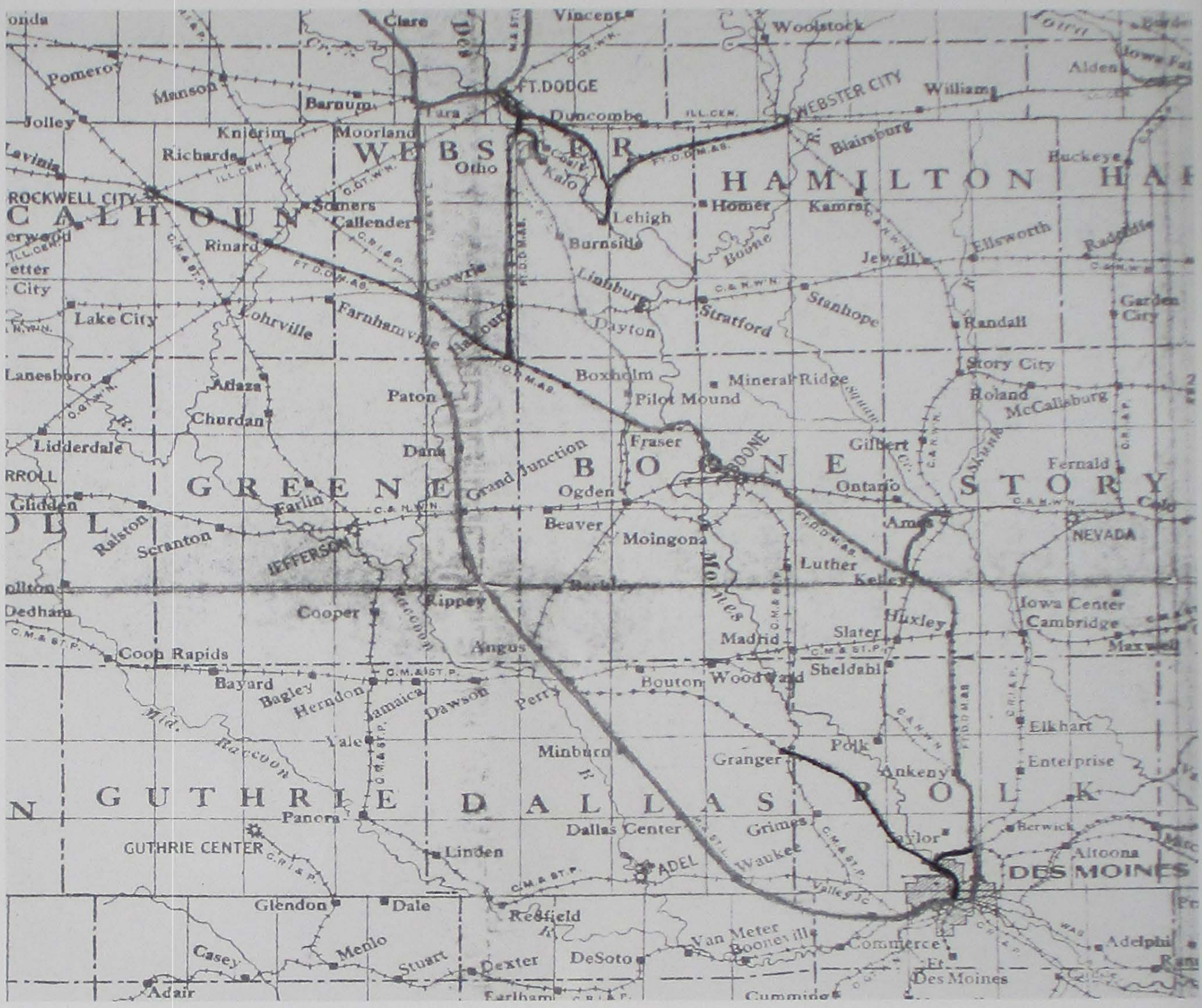
Above: The lot in front of the DM&CI office in Des Moines ironically was leased to an auto dealer.

M. P. Gross and M. H. Snerson—who collectively held 92 per cent of DM&CI stock, took control of FDL. The matter was finalized at $672,215 on December 27, 1955. [4]

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern under the Salzberg flag sought and received little publicity. Net profit was elusive as the company worked through its dieselization program and elimination of electrical operation. The operating ratio leaped to 102.04 in fiscal 1955, but eased to 85.14 in 1956. More locomotives were added—44-tons—as were bulkhead flatcars, a used Jordan Spreader and two flangers, maintenance of way machines, and assorted boxcars. By the end of 1960, the road would have 833 freight cars available for interline service. Carloads dropped from 28,651 in 1955 to 26,866 in 1956, 24,320 in 1959, and 22,943 in 1960—mostly explained by diminished demand for building materials, variations in growing conditions, government policy, and demand for agricultural commodities. Management spent modestly on physical plant, kept tight control of expenses, and the company produced a net profit of $4,592 in 1959, $16,610 in 1960. [5]

Top Right: As always, FtDDM&S relied on gypsum mills for heavy traffic. Here two box cars are heading for the Bestwall (former Certainteed) plant. March 1957

Bottom Right: Management spent modestly on physical plant and kept tight control over expenses. A substantial drag has been assembled at Boone on this March day in 1957.



Above: M&StL officers saw much that was attractive in the traffic base of FDL and DM&CI--most of whose lines could be abandoned if acquired.

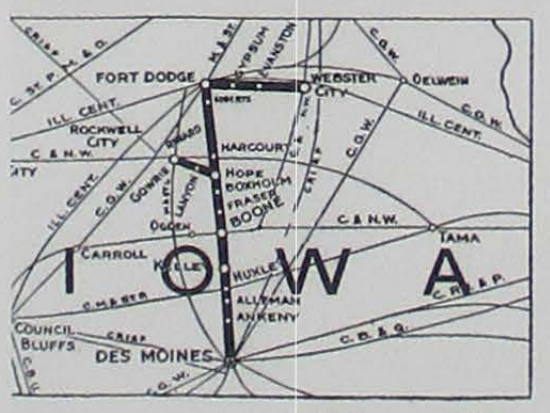
Right: M&StL evaluators found FDL as it long had been--a line typically laid with ancient 70-pound rail devoid of anchors and tie plates with a modicum of cinder ballast.

Left: M&StL was unimpressed with FDL's shipper base other than that found at Fort Dodge and Des Moines--Alleman being an exception.

Bottom Left: What really caught the eve of M&StL managers was the array of gypsum plants east of Fort Dodge. Here a cut of cars is being pulled from the United States Gypsum facility--served exclusively by FDL.

Even as the Salzberg interests were digesting FtDDM&S, managers of Minneapolis & St. Louis, FDL's rival in the Fort Dodge-Des Moines corridor, probed for strategic opportunities. Early in 1955 and again in 1960, M&StL made studies with the idea of acquiring Mason City & Clear Lake, an important feeder at Mason City, and in March 1957, William Coliton, Stephen Owens, and James Sullivan gathered information on and made an inspection of Des Moines & Central Iowa and Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern. It took little time to convince this trio that purchase of the latter two Iowa roads "would be of substantial benefit" to M&StL, and they urged that a "serious effort be made as soon as possible to acquire them." DM&CI, they pointed out, had exclusive entry to the large Firestone Tire & Rubber plant at Des Moines and had attractive industrial properties adjacent to its lines at several locations. FDL likewise served important industries at Des Moines and reached the many gypsum mills near Fort Dodge. The study team pointed out that substantial tonnage could be diverted to M&StL's Fort Dodge-Des Moines artery and that all but 52 miles of FtDDM&S could be abandoned. For whatever reason, nothing was done to purchase any of these properties. The explanation may have been that M&StL was stalking bigger game, but as it turned out M&StL itself would be swallowed up by Chicago & North Western in 1960. [6]

Meanwhile, a sense of crisis and despair enveloped the nation's railroads. One Wall Street firm gloomily concluded that the industry appeared "to be in a struggle for survival," and *Business Week* called rail securities "one of the stock market's lame ducks." *Forbes* was no



Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Company

"Ship Via"

The Short Line Between Fort Dodge and Des Moines

RAILROAD CONNECTIONS

Boone, Iowa C. & N. W.
Des Moines, Ia. C. & N. W., C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., D. M. & C. I., N. & W.
Fort Dodge, Ia. C. G. W., Ill. Cent., C. & N. W.
Gowrie, Iowa — C. & N. W., C. R. I. & P.
Harcourt, Iowa — C. & N. W.
Huxley, Iowa — C. M. St. P. & P.
Kelley, Iowa — C. & N. W.
Webster City, Ia. — C. & N. W., Ill. Cent.

Above: FDL continued to advertise track connections with virtually all of Iowa's horizontal trunk carriers.

Left: Boxholm was a "good station"--i.e., it typically produced substantial freight revenue.

less pessimistic. "In a year [1956] when the rest of the economy was exuberantly setting new records, the $34 billion railroad industry remained inconsolably stalled," it groaned. Matters only worsened. Net income for the country's Class I railroads in 1957 was 14 per cent below 1956; they handled 2,344,661 fewer cars, down 6.2 per cent in one year alone. Several roads failed to earn adequately to meet fixed interest and rental charges. Sprawling Chicago & North Western had not paid a dividend on its common stock since 1950; *Forbes* referred to it derisively as "New York Central of the West." The 544-mile New York, Ontario & Western simply expired that same year. [7]

A few policy-makers took note. Senator George Smathers (D-Florida) even admitted, "Available statistics indicate that the American railroads are heading for serious trouble. "*Railway Age* screamed "OUTRAGE" in a special supplement for October 7, 1957, charging that public policy put "shocking limitations on American development" by "keeping the railroads in chains." Congress agreed to listen. Railroaders complained of subsidized competition, discriminatory and often confiscatory taxes, and obsolete regulation that shackled the industry's ability to compete. C&NW's Ben W. Heineman argued that railroad problems were only two—labor and regulation, both sheltered by counterproductive public policy. Congressional response was passage of the Transportation Act of 1958, signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, which among other things ordered the Interstate Commerce Commission to be a bit more liberal in granting railroad requests and authorized the ICC to overrule state regulatory agencies on petitions to abandon lines or eliminate money-losing services. Southern Pacific's

Right Top and Bottom: *The Ames branch, with its handsome depot at Ames and trackage into the power plant at Iowa State University, was lopped off at mid-summer 1965.*

Donald J. Russell likely spoke for all senior railroad managers when he offered guarded praise for the new legislation and reminded that much remained "to be done to free the industry from the network of special laws and regulations which unfairly place the railroads in a position of competitive disadvantage in our free enterprise system." Statistics for 1958 underscored Russell's concern: a decline of 5,293,654 loaded freight cars, a drop of 14.9 per cent from the preceding year, and a dreary 2.76 per cent return on investment. Several senior railroad managers around the country urged merger as a serious nostrum. Pennsylvania's A. J. Greenough said bluntly: "Our industry must face up to the simple fact that there are just too many railroads in the country today for their own good and for the public's good." Mergers, he said, "and the consequent elimination of duplicate facilities and wasteful competition within the industry are the only solution." A more receptive ICC—by 1960 made up completely of Eisenhower appointees—promised to listen carefully. The disappearance of M&StL into the bowels of C&NW was a reflection of this. [8]

The Fort Dodge Line under Salzberg management marched to a mixed cadence and produced mixed results. Company traffic representatives developed an industrial site near Swanwood, attracted new customers at Fort Dodge (an asphalt firm, Flintkote warehouse, Davenport Electric, Brady Transfer & Storage, Fort Dodge Ice & Cold Storage), at Des Moines (a coal company and a steel firm), at Boone (Fareway Stores), and fertilizer blending stations at Alleman, Boxholm, and Lanyon. Carloadings held fairly steady, 21,630 in 1961, 20,471 in 1964 with gypsum products and grain leading as usual. Shipments of sewer pipe and

tile from Lehigh to various regional destinations had been strong during the mid-to-late 1950s, but fell off badly thereafter—only 155 cars in 1960, 112 in 1961. FDL historically advertised itself as having track connections with virtually all of Iowa's trunk roads, and while it always sought for itself the longest haul, those many interchange options often resulted in the company being short hauled. Tonnage from Lehigh, for example, often found itself on the C&NW transfer at Webster City—a mere sixteen miles from origin. Other alternatives were more attractive. The Milwaukee Road connection at Huxley was especially busy with plaster, lath, and wallboard from Fort Dodge moving eastbound, empty boxes, lumber, beer, and coal arriving inbound. Huxley gave FDL a 62-mile road haul from Fort Dodge. The company purchased more mechanized track equipment to "materially reduce man hours" in maintenance of way, contracted with Sperry Railcar to examine main line rail, and it put down heavier rail from East Fort Dodge to the top of Summit Hill near Roberts and from Boone through Fraser to the top of the hill near Wolf. But financial results were depressing—net losses from operations in 1961 through 1964 and a startling net loss of $680,034 over that four-year span. [9]

A scalpel was forthcoming. When Chicago Great Western vacated its line into downtown Fort Dodge, FDL followed suit—selling property for $163,000 and making way for "street improvements" and a new YMCA building. The freight station and former passenger depot at Fourteenth Street and First Avenue had been unused since October 1959 when all functions had been moved to yard facilities at Fourteenth Avenue South. More importantly, the road on March 28, 1960, filed to abandon its line from Evanston Junction to Lehigh. Protestors filed exceptions, but the Interstate Commerce Commission gave its blessing and on February 15, 1962, the line was embargoed. Salvaging began late in April and the final spike was pulled on May 23. Next up was that portion of the Rockwell City branch from Gowrie to Rockwell City, 19.1 miles, after a carload of grain dropped through a failed bridge in April 1962 and FDL applied to abandon. Again exceptions were filed but FDL showed that 489 carloads had moved to or from that portion of line in 1960, 479 in 1961, and only 76 in the first months of 1962—inadequate to justify rehabilitation of that line segment. ICC agreed, formal abandonment coming on May 5, 1963, Milwaukee Road acquiring FDL's station grounds and track at Rockwell City for $27,000. Then came the 6.89-mile Ames branch which was lopped off at mid-summer 1965 when C&NW acquired FDL's tracks into the Iowa State University steam plant. [10]

Events and circumstance of FtDDM&S were not entirely a mirrored image of the domestic rail industry at large, but there were distinct similarities. The year 1960 proved rugged for the American railroad industry. Milwaukee Road blamed the "general recession which sharply reduced revenues..." North Western, too, registered disappointing results because of "the low level at which the economy as a whole operated in 1960." And stodgy Illinois Central complained of "unexpectedly lean months." The year 1961 was better, but the future proved cloudy. In 1961, the country's Class One railroads reported net income of only $384 million, in 1962 $574 million—the increase in the latter year partly the consequence of new federal tax policy that included investment credits plus accelerated depreciation. These changes were beneficial for all although they tended to aid the more prosperous roads—Santa Fe and Union Pacific as examples—with lesser advantage for Rock Island and others that were struggling. At Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, billings declined from 24,320 carloads in 1959 to 18,231 in 1967 with corresponding loss of revenue. The pattern was the same elsewhere. Chicago Great Western handled 252,087 carloads in 1959, only 207,554 in 1967; CGW's net income in 1959 had been $2,728,000, but tallied only $362,884 in 1967. Milwaukee Road generated more ton miles in 1967 than in 1960, and it posted higher net operating income, but factored for inflation its performance was hardly impressive. The same was true at Illinois Central where freight revenue in 1956 had been $248.9 million, rising only to $256.7 million in 1967; net income in 1956 had been $23.8 million, up very modestly to $25.3 in 1967. Even the vaunted Burlington Route shuddered, its working capital of $9.7 million on January 1, 1968, falling to only $2.7 million by year's end. CB&Q also had begun to defer maintenance on its historically well-groomed plant. [11]

The country's railroad industry frankly had more capacity than could be profitably engaged in a world of expanding privately owned pipelines, publicly supported multiple-lane super highways, sophisticated internal waterways, and jet aircraft aloft. Managers struggled to adjust. Every company, to one extent or another, determined to reduce employee numbers,

discontinue money-losing passenger trains, and abandon branch lines. Managers and investors also looked in the medicine chest and gazed at the bottle marked "merger." But the contents were potent. "Mergers contain no magic," said IC's Wayne A. Johnston in 1960, "nor do they solve our basic problems of freedom to compete." IC in 1962 nevertheless made an unsuccessful run at Chicago & Eastern Illinois and began merger studies to acquire Gulf, Mobile & Ohio. C&NW also made a substantial investment in Gulf Mobile & Ohio even as it explored combination with Milwaukee Road which itself had discussed amalgamation with Rock Island while Rock Island had presented itself to Missouri Pacific. In 1962, Union Pacific and Southern Pacific instead proposed jointly to acquire faltering Rock Island and parcel it between them. A greatly frightened North Western made a counteroffer and others lined up in fierce opposition. Santa Fe joined with Missouri Pacific and then St. Louis-San Francisco in exploratory talks and fussed mightily when Southern Pacific tried to capture Western Pacific. And Milwaukee and North Western renewed "on again, off again" merger talks. [12]

On roared the merger merry-go-round. Chicago Great Western in 1963 called off combination with Soo Line, a few months later receiving a written offer of merger from Chicago & North Western. The ICC scheduled hearings for 1965. By that time Norfolk & Western gathered up Wabash to expand its reach westward to Kansas City, Des Moines, and Council Bluffs. The biggest merger news of all, however, was the growing possibility of combining Burlington with Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and Spokane, Portland & Seattle into a 25,000-mile behemoth reaching from Chicago to Puget Sound and from Montana to Texas. Papers were filed in 1961. [13]

Above: FDL never had an adequate number of bulkhead flats to accommodate demand for wallboard producers at Fort Dodge.

The experience of FtDDM&S during the mid-1960s was very much as it had been since Salzberg took over. New customers were recruited at Des Moines (a ready mixed concrete concern), Ankeny (two manufacturing plants), Boone (Archway Cookies, a steel firm, a bulk plant, an envelope company), Fort Dodge (Rock Island Mills) as well as fertilizer blending facilities at Palm Grove, Alleman, Boone, Lundgren, Napier, and Brushy. These new

Above: Long drags on FtDDM&S like this one trundling northward near Huxley would be a thing of the past under C&NW. *Don L. Hofsommer photograph.*

accounts, sad to say, did not generate volume to offset a general if slow slippage in revenue carloads—19,871 in 1965, 18,231 in 1967. Movement of grain, as always, varied according to crop yield, government policy, and demand. In 1959, FDL handled 2,276 carloads of grain, in 1967 3,615. The fall off of traffic from gypsum mills was explained by lower housing starts but also because Illinois Central, FDL's chief competitor, could and did supply a much greater supply of bulkhead flats that the short line could not match and, predictably, IC ran away with a growing percentage of that business. Numbers told the story: in 1959, FDL billed 14,969 carloads of gypsum products, only 7,830 in 1967. Nevertheless, FDL continued to pursue its gradual process of upgrading roadbed and track structure, contracting with Sperry for an annual check of rail condition, widening cuts, strengthening fills, increasing bridge capacity to 263,000-pound load limits, and maintaining its rolling stock and inventory of 70-ton and two 44-ton locomotives. But despite every attempt at efficiency and frugal management, the company continued to churn out red ink—net loss from operation each year, but in 1966 registering a net profit of $72,630 attributable to "net operating loss carry forwards," essentially from full retirement of the generating plant at Fraser. [14]

The year 1967 proved especially difficult for the country's railroads, Chicago Great Western's load count was down by 20,000 cars from 1966, a slide of nearly 10 per cent and representative of the industry at large. Reduced billings reflected a slump in the national economy, but also served to point up the need for public policy that finally recognized inequitable governmental posture toward various modes of transportation. "Roughly one-half of the intercity freight transportation measured in ton miles moves totally free from economic regulation, that is, totally free from regulation of rates," growled C&NW's Ben W. Heineman. "The United States transportation system cannot survive half slave and half free," Heineman warned. President John F. Kennedy had been

Left & Bottom: C&NW would have no use for FtDDM&S office facilities in Boone--neither the historic structure nor new offices across the track.

sympathetic to change, but his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, was rather more caught up in Great Society programs and became fully ensnared by the Viet Nam War. Still there was a sense among at least some politicians that railroads needed a fairer shake. **15**

Merger was one area in which railroad managers and public policymakers grudgingly conceded as appropriate medicine, but the process proved nearly always slow and painful. The merger movement—as much a part of the railroad mosaic as locomotives and cars, rail and ties—gained momentum during the 1960s. In 1960, Erie combined with Delaware, Lackawanna & Western to form Erie Lackawanna and, of course, C&NW purchased M&StL. During the following year Canadian Pacific placed three of its American flags under one—Soo Line—while in 1963 Chesapeake & Ohio gained control of Baltimore & Ohio. Norfolk & Western moved boldly in 1964 to merge Nickel Plate, lease Wabash and Pittsburgh

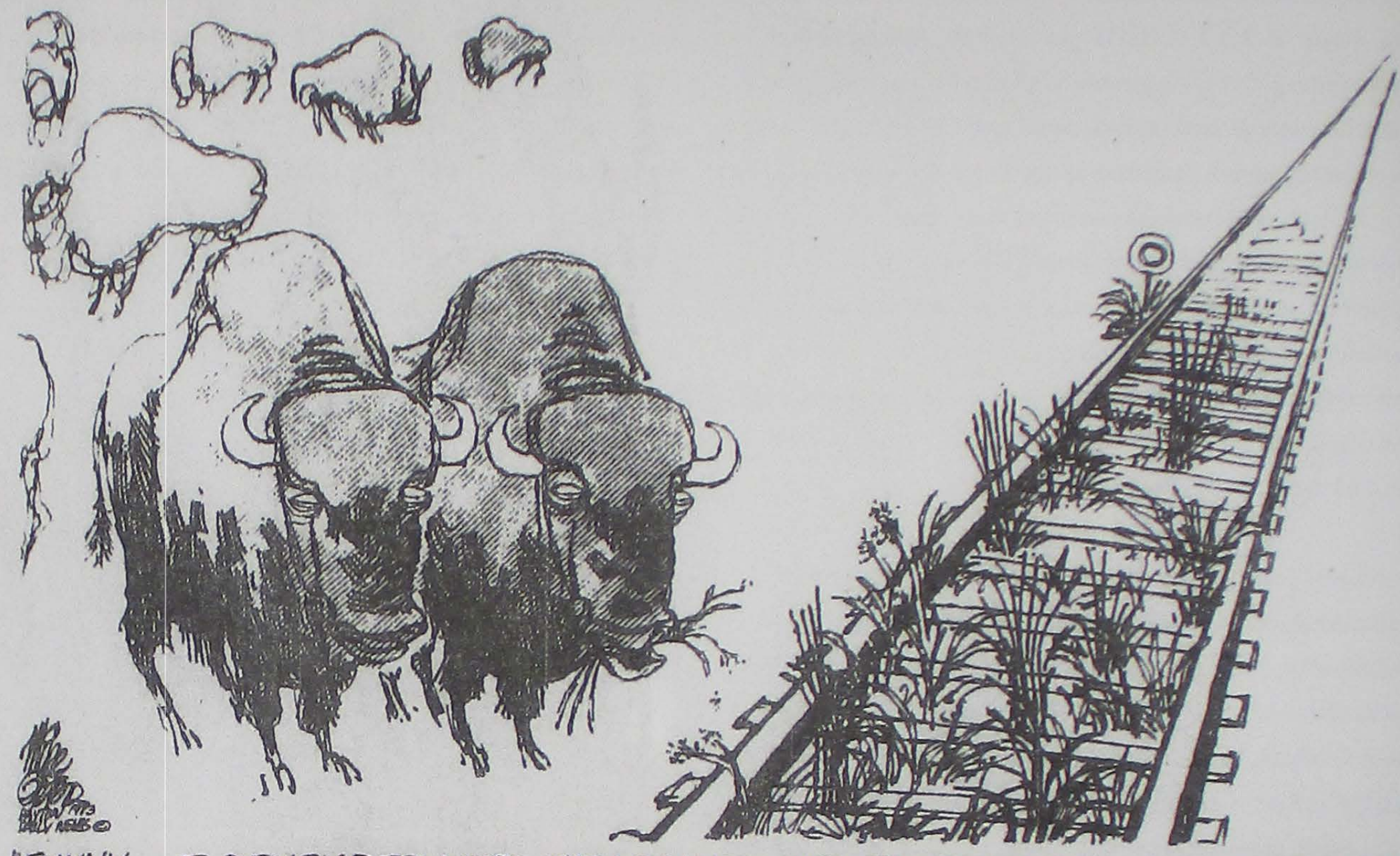
& West Virginia, and gain control over Akron, Canton & Youngstown. Seaboard Coast Line resulted from the merger of Atlantic Coast Line and Seaboard Air Line in 1967, and a year later, closer at hand, C&NW gathered in mid-sized Chicago Great Western. But the big news in 1968 was combination in the East of arch rivals New York Central and Pennsylvania to form Penn Central which, in turn, was expanded the same year when New York, New Haven & Hartford was added. No decision, however, on combination of Burlington with Great Northern, Northern Pacific and others—the matter still rattling through bureaucratic labyrinth and sluggish courts, and nothing yet from federal regulators on the half-decade-old attempt by Union Pacific and Southern Pacific to acquire and then parcel Rock Island between them. [16]

Acquisitions and mergers were, of course, an integral part of the American railroad fabric, but acquisition of Chicago Great Western by larger rival Chicago & North Western created considerable anxiety in Iowa where C&NW was not well regarded, especially after it had purchased Minneapolis & St. Louis in 1960 with the effect of reducing competition and lowering service levels. More so—the case with Great Western since the two roads, C&NW and CGW, served common terminal end points (Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Council Bluffs/Omaha) as well as many intermediate locations across the state of Iowa.

C&NW management certainly would reduce redundancies, i.e., implement service reductions and pursue a bold policy of massive abandonment. Indeed, C&NW's business plan was brilliantly transparent: 1) get out from under the burden of Chicago commuter operation; 2) get rid of branches as quickly as possible, and; 3) reignite an affectionate relationship with Union Pacific on heavy traffic in the Chicago-Council Bluffs corridor. Chicago Great Western passed to C&NW on July 1, 1968. [17]

It was in this fluid and uncertain environment regarding the nation's railways and public policy as it played out in Iowa that a tiny three-inch column appeared deep in the *Waterloo Courier* for January 6, 1967 which announced that Chicago & North Western had plans to acquire Des Moines & Central Towa and with it Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern—both of which had "facilities duplicated by those of North Western." Duplicated indeed. FDL and C&NW each served Webster City, Harcourt, Boone, Kelley, Gowrie, Ankeny, Des Moines and, now with CGW under its belt, Fort Dodge. C&NW and DM&CI together served Des Moines. "If approved," said C&NW's Ben W. Heineman, it "will result in substantial benefits" and represent a "major step to strengthening the competitive position of Chicago & North Western." There was little opposition and it was futile. On July 29, 1968, C&NW paid out $5.1 million for Des Moines & Central Iowa and its Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern affiliate. What did C&NW see in these two former interurban roads? Its focus would be the same as it had been on the former M&StL and now on CGW—eliminate competition and eliminate redundancies, and as to FDL, to gain access to the gypsum traffic at Fort Dodge and for DM&CI to reach the Firestone plant at Des Moines. [18]

Change came with predictable swiftness. The Salzberg directors and management disappeared (with the temporary exception two salesmen at Boone), replaced by C&NW officers and directors in Chicago with operational authority vested in the road's Iowa Division personnel and dispatching likewise soon done by North Western. FtDDM&S remained a corporate shell and shortly after acquisition by C&NW trackage rights and pooling operations were arranged for service between Fort Dodge and Des Moines. Trains were made up by C&NW at Boone and orange and cream painted FDL GE locomotives hustled over to handle trains for Fort Dodge or Des Moines—normally only one train on the line at a time. Much of the gypsum traffic from Fort Dodge now moved briefly to C&NW at Webster City and then to Boone. Effective June 21, 1971, FDL leased all tangible properties and rights to C&NW for an annual rental of $60,000 plus depreciation, operating lease rentals, expenses and non-depreciable retirement charges. Three years later the road spent $125,000 to acquire Des Moines Western Railway which for years it had leased, and in 1976 the company sold substantially all of its boxcars for $914,000 to Minneapolis Industrial Railway, another C&NW affiliate. FDL had net loss operating carry forward of $651,000 expiring through 1978 and investment credit carry forward of $29,000 expiring in subsequent years through 1982. [19]



The decade of the 1970s was, in any number of respects an acute curiosity. The nation finally extricated itself from a lengthy and expensive war in Viet Nam; Gerald Ford, a presidential anomaly—neither elected to the presidency nor the vice presidency, but appointed vice president with the departure of Spiro T. Agnew and then elevated to the White House when Richard Nixon left in disgrace—failed to survive the election of 1976, and was replaced by Jimmy Carter, a Georgia peanut farmer. Double-digit inflation gripped the country; an energy crisis escalated fuel prices and resulted in long lines for motorists at the gas pump; American hostages were taken in Iran; and, the country's self-confidence waned.

These same currents and cross currents were reflected, in one way or another, by the nation's railroads. Historian Richard Saunders has argued that American carriers experienced their "darkest midnight" during the early 1970s. Probably. But that blackest midnight continued at mid-decade, and gave way only haltingly and grudgingly in the years following. In the East, sprawling Penn Central was bankrupt. Several neighbors soon joined it in financial humiliation. In the immediate area, Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific and Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific both headed for the courts and, in fact, stumbled toward oblivion. C&NW, which by acquisition of M&StL, CGW, DM&CI, and FtDDM&S, had more mileage in the state than any other carrier, took a firm position. North Western's Larry Provo contended that the Iowa net was greatly overbuilt given current needs and predicted that his road and others would end up like Rock Island in bankruptcy if they could not streamline their systems. "We're not going to say a lot of things just to make ourselves popular in Iowa," said a spokesman for the road. C&NW then announced plans to excise at least one-third of route miles in the state.

Iowa's Department of Transportation late in 1977 declared 1,780 route miles superfluous—bits and pieces of all major roads. The carriers themselves were much more aggressive, filing on some pieces that at one time had been major arteries, e.g., the former Chicago Great Western main from Oelwein to Dubuque dumped by C&NW as an example. In some cases a decision from regulatory authorities could be long in resolution, but the arguments always were the same: the carriers contending that customers had forsaken rails, customers complaining that railroads had allowed deterioration of plant to the point where business was driven away. Truth often was in the middle. By 1981, Iowa would be down to a rail network only half of that a decade earlier. [20]

The axe fell on FtDDM&S incrementally—like chopping off a dog's tail an inch at a time—which was C&NW's style. Flugstad to Webster City was abandoned early in 1972 and the main line was severed at the same time on the north from Shady Oak to Roberts. Lading to and from Fort Dodge presently moved over lines of former CGW or M&StL. The former Rockwell City branch also was chopped back from Lanyon to Gowrie in 1972. Further trimming came in 1979 from Evanston to Flugstad and in 1982 from Gypsum to Evanston. Much of the rest had been retired in place but the official end of the entire main line from East Fort Dodge to Swanwood, 74.2 miles, came in 1983, bits and pieces surviving into the next year. The same fate befell DM&CI, abandoned except for a thin line into the Firestone plant in 1980-1984. Scrappers quickly accomplished their melancholy task of tearing out ties and removing rail; agriculturalists or Mother Nature soon reclaimed rights-of-way. In a few years only those with razor-sharp memories or very active imaginations could point to their locations. In time, they, too, shall pass; then only the land will hold memories of glorious days when the iron horse or "the interurban" proudly pounded up and down those vital pathways. [21]

Ironically, a group of Boone residents thought big, raised some money, and purchased track in Boone from Crawford Street through the Des Moines River valley to Wolf, and out of it was born the Boone & Scenic Valley, a tourist pike that matured over the years to attract many visitors to the area and, by indirection, to celebrate the life and time of "the interurban." The ghosts of Hamilton Browne, Homer Loring, Clyde Crooks, Arthur Wheelock and maybe even Murray Salzberg must smile wryly at that most unexpected development. [22]

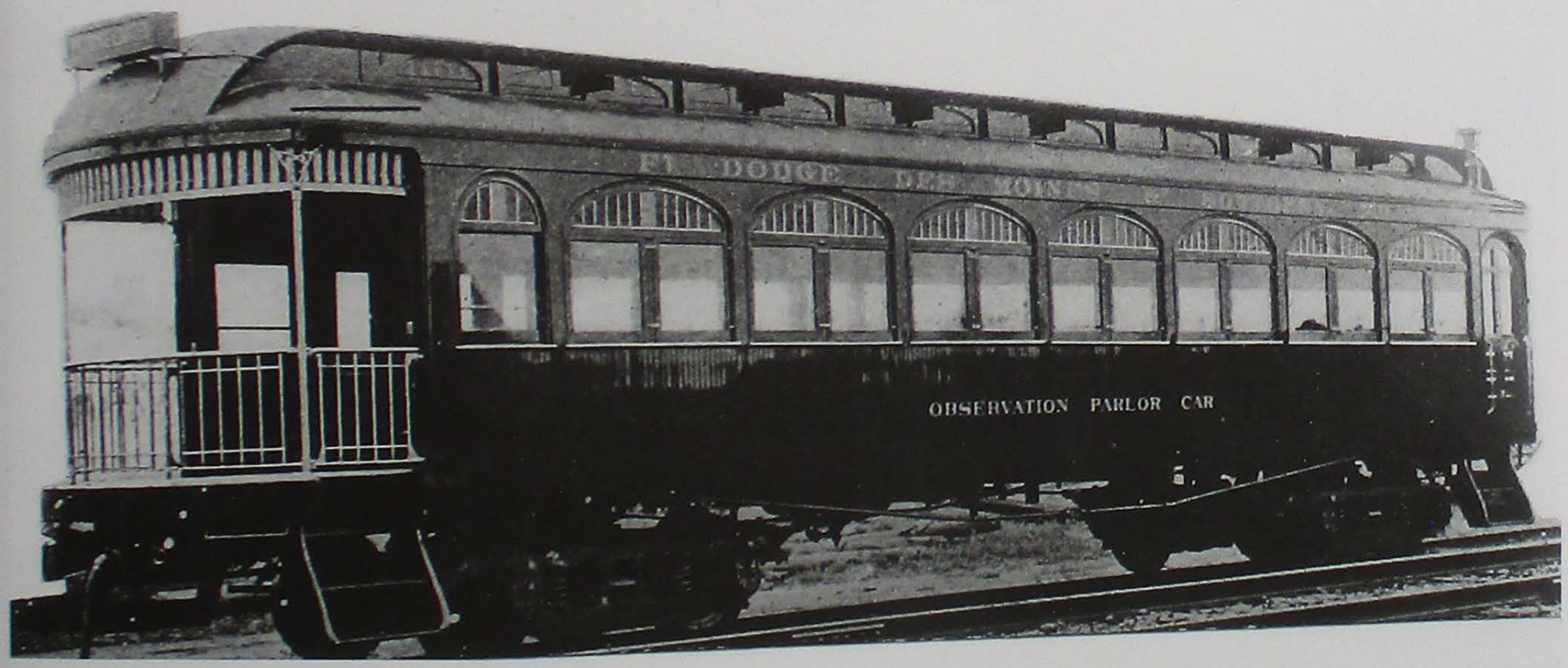
Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern and Des Moines & Central Iowa were merged into Chicago & North Western and then liquidated on December 31, 1983. [23]


66
66
FORT DODGE
BOONE
DES MOINES
2

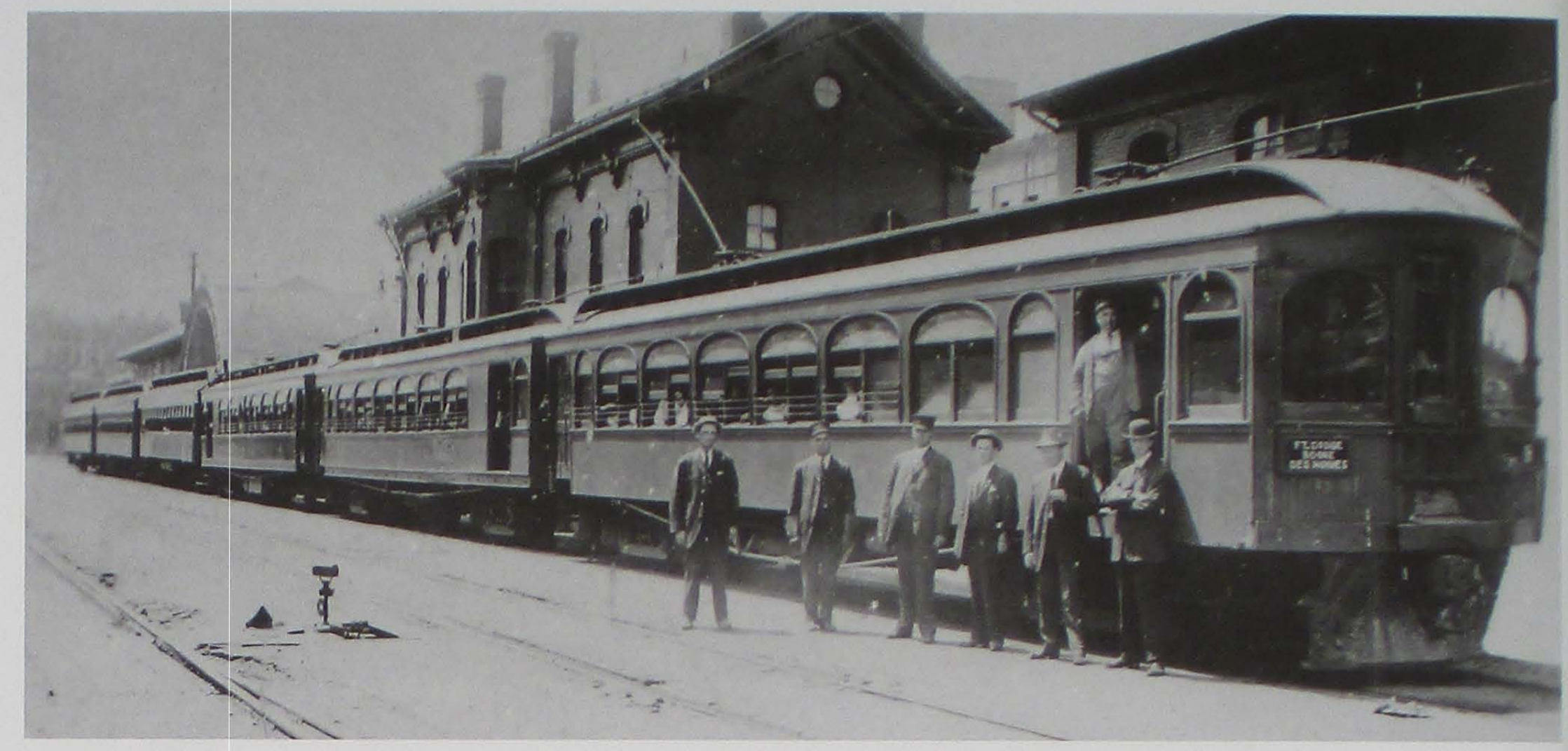
13

Passenger & Freight Operations

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, from the outset of electrification, was designed as a steam railroad with expectations of significant freight traffic while at the same time offering fast, frequent, and efficient passenger service. The road's passenger cars, built by Niles in 1907, were constructed to steam railroad standards—53 feet 3⅝ inches in length and 9 feet 4 inches in width. Each car sported 13 reversible seats in the main compartment, 8 seats in the smoking section, with a baggage area and motorman's compartment ahead. A parade of these cars zipped up and down the main line between Fort Dodge and Des Moines and on branches to Ames, Rockwell City, and Webster City-Lehigh. The line even provided luxury service with two observation-parlor cars staffed by a porter. And company streetcars served the needs of both Ames and Fort Dodge, all of it to the great pleasure and satisfaction of customers—for a while. [1]



Above: The Fort Dodge Line strove to match the steam roads for elegance and opulence with this 1912 Jewett Car Company product.
Krambles-Peterson Archive



Above: The ten powered cars from Niles Car & Manufacturing sported 13 reversible seats in the main compartment, 8 more seats in the smoking section.

Above: Train Time at Kelley, May 9, 1937. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Passenger Service

The nation's interurban craze, of which FDDM&S was a part, barely predated the nation's even bigger craze for the "horseless carriage." Even as the first interurban car rolled into Fort Dodge, the local press carried advertisements for Cadillac, Buick, and Pope-Hartford "motor cars." The implications were ominous. Indeed, salad days for FDDM&S in the passenger trade were brief in the extreme. Streetcar service ended in Fort Dodge in 1925, Ames in 1929. Intercity passenger operation to Rockwell City foundered in 1926, while service to Lehigh, Webster City, and Ames folded in 1928. What survived after 1928 was a schedule of four daily turns on the main line. With receivership in 1930 it was no surprise when management cut service to a pair of round trips and then reduced the passenger car roster from 22 in 1929 to 8 in 1933 and later to only 5. [2]

The 1930s saw additional economies being made. Parlor car service ended in the winter of 1931-1932. Also, there were cutbacks at both ends to eliminate the last street running in Des Moines (1938) and Fort Dodge (1940). [3]

When rationing of rubber tires and gasoline came in the wake of World War II, the Fort Dodge Line, like all other carriers, found its passenger trains in great demand once again. But now it could offer but a mere 240 seats on a daily basis and then only if all five cars were available for service. Increased ticket sales put smiles on the faces of managers and the company was relieved to leave the protection of the bankruptcy courts in 1943. [4]

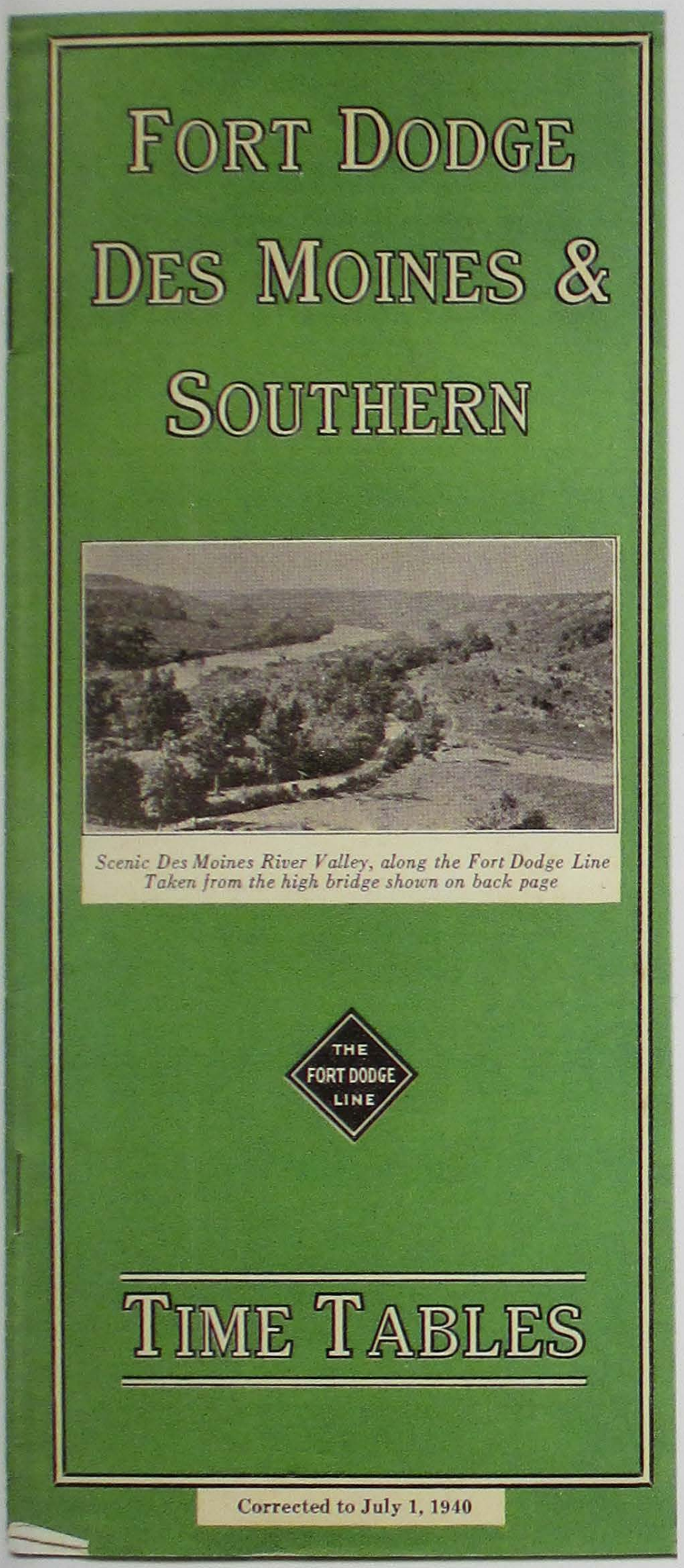
Above: FDL cars in the Fort Dodge downtown business district had been a feature for many years. Street running in Fort Dodge continued for another year after this view of car 66 was recorded on May 27, 1939. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: After street running in Fort Dodge ended, cars were turned at a loop track where No. 72 readies for the return to Des Moines in May 1951. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: FDL ended Des Moines street running on January 1, 1938, cutting operations back to an unpretentious terminal at 7th and Court streets. No. 66 lays over on May 27, 1939, with Capitol Hill in the background. *Robert V. Mehlenbeck photo; Norman Carlson collection*

The end of hostilities in 1945 saw the end of great demand for the kind of localized rail passenger service the Fort Dodge Line offered as America renewed its love affair with the automobile. The four daily round trips scheduled during the war were trimmed by half and the cars remained in service to move company crews between points on the railroad as much as for common carrier purposes. The body blow of June floods in 1954 caused a five-month suspension of passenger service which ultimately led to the loss of the line's mail contract and its express business. Once service resumed there was but one daily train which started in Boone, ran north to Fort Dodge, back south to Des Moines, and ultimately back to Boone to end the day's run. [5]

The Fort Dodge Line had been given permission by the Iowa Commerce Commission to discontinue all passenger service in 1952. Oddly enough, service continued to quietly operate for another three years even though it could have been legally ended at any time by the railroad. The line finally served notice that the last day of passenger service was to be on August 14, 1955. Even then, for the benefit of rail enthusiasts and others who wanted one last ride on a vanishing mode of transportation, the final runs did not occur until August 31, 1955. One last railfan excursion run on September 11 finally brought the curtain down on The Fort Dodge Line's passenger operations. [6]



Above: FDL featured scenic views along the line on the covers of its timetables as evidenced by the one from July 1, 1940. *Richard A. Krisak collection*

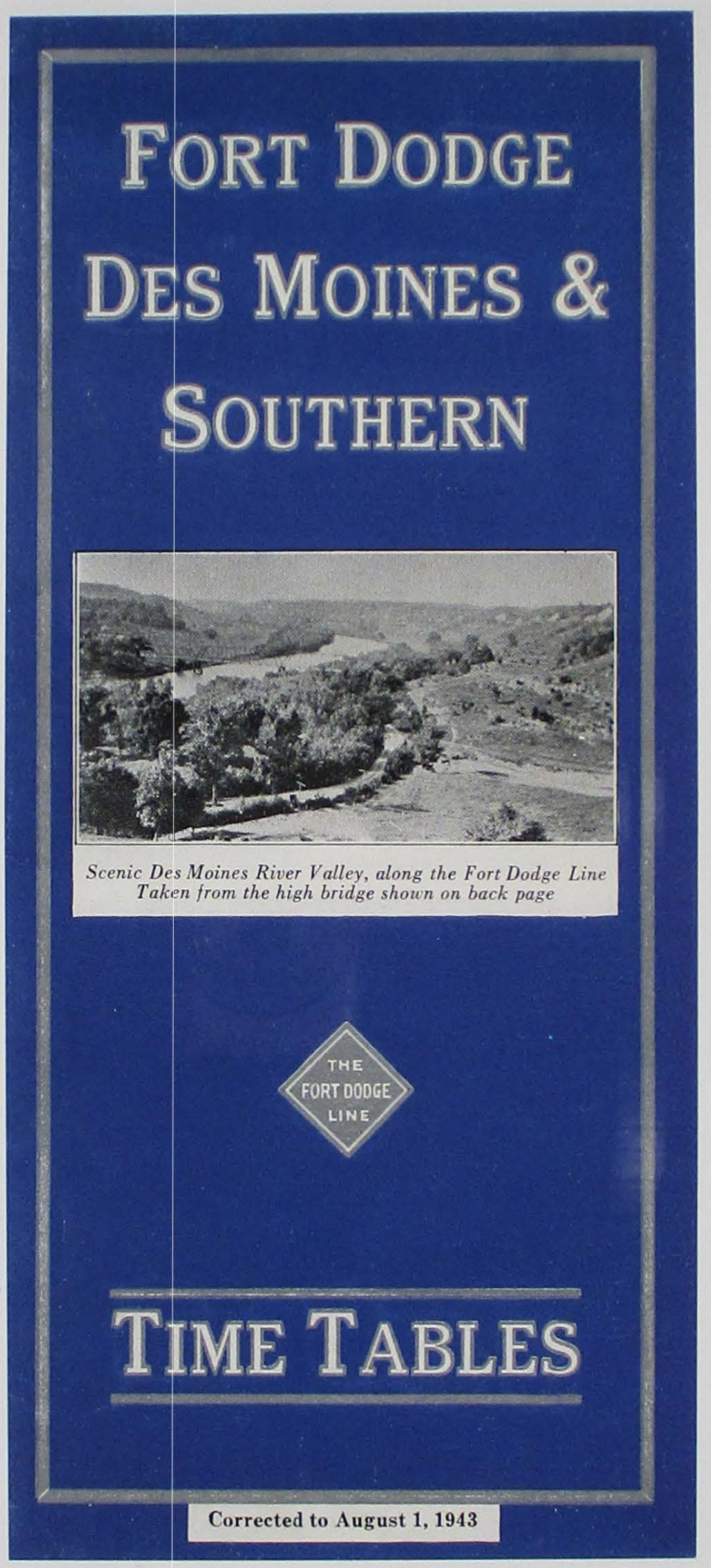
Above: FtDDM&S always welcomed special excursions. Two boys take the opportunity to explore a YMCA special while no one's looking. View at Des Moines; June, 18, 1940. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

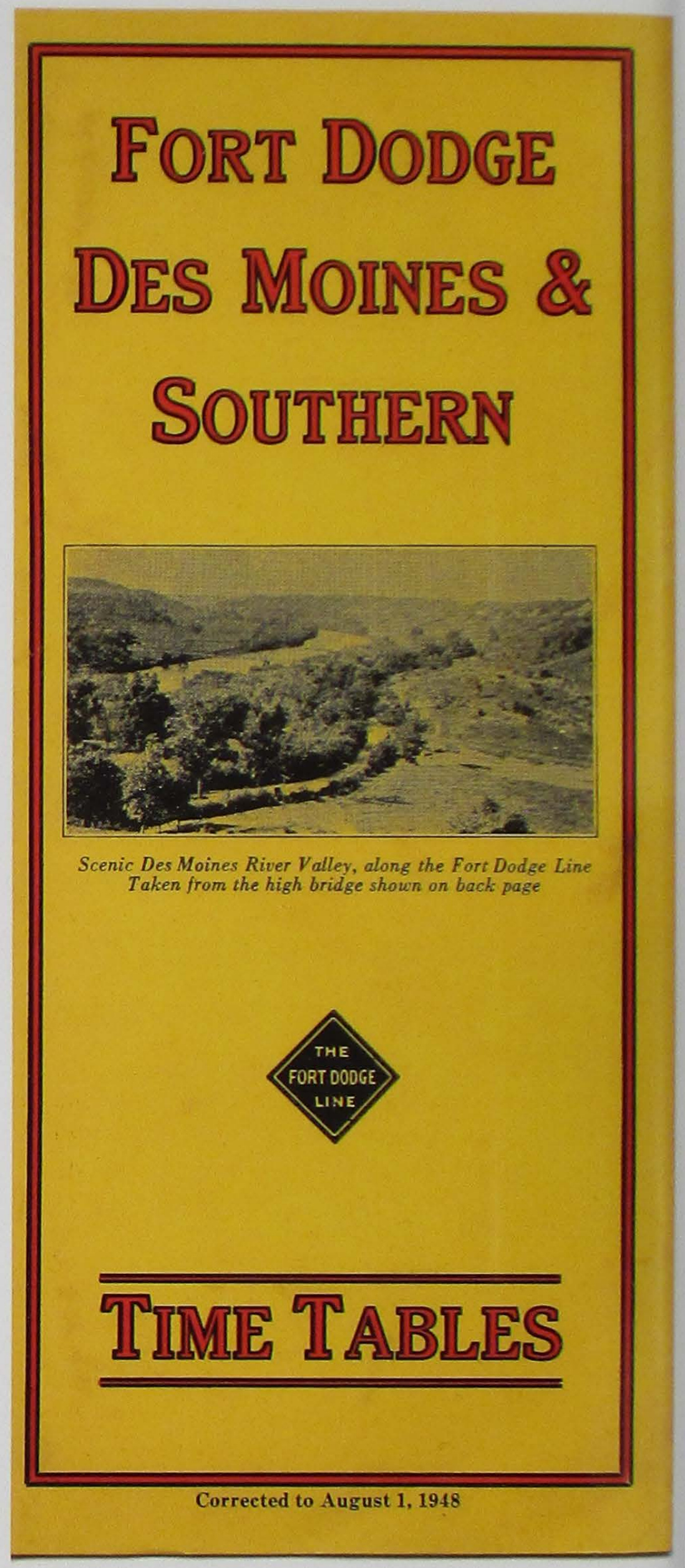
Above: Cars 66 and 62 share a well-groomed right-of-way at Huxley on June 13, 1940. *John F. Humiston photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: Shadows lengthened for FtDDM&S passenger operations after the awful flood of June 1954. This excursion dating from September 26, 1954, poses over the C&NW east of Boone. *James J. Buckley photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: FDL's impressive office building at Boone served as backdrop for this southbound run. *Anthony F. Krisak photo; Richard A. Krisak collection*

Above: Cars 72 and 82 greet each other at Boone. Photo from June 9, 1949. *Norman Carlson collection*





Above: *Richard A. Krisak collection*

Above: Cars terminating at Boone could be reversed through use of a turntable. Car 74 was resting upon it on July 13, 1940. *Frank E. Butts photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: FDL faced engineering challenges getting into and out of the Des Moines River valley above Boone. Car 62 holds down a run north of Boone in May 1951. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

A willingness to host special excursions was a hallmark tradition of the company early and late. That fact was underscored in the late depression years of the 1930s and after the conclusion of World War II when the road had excess capacity it was eager to fill. The Fort Dodge Line historically moved enthusiastic youngsters from the YMCA camp above Boone and it welcomed interest from groups of railroad and traction enthusiasts. Such was the case when the Iowa Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society sponsored a gala three-car excursion on July 26, 1953, to cover all lines north of Boone. And it was that same Iowa chapter that used two cars for the somber final run on September 11, 1955. [7]

Above: FDL No. 62 poses at Hope on a May 1951 fantrip. *Robert V. Mehlenbeck photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Fantrip car made a call at Rockwell City where passenger service had ended in 1926. This scene dates to November 3, 1951. *Bernard L. Stone photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Cars 74 and 62 meet at Boxholm on May 12, 1951. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Fantrip car 62 straddles the C&NW crossing at Harcourt in May 1951. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Company

FORT DODGE
Tel. Walnut 1232
Walnut 3701

DES MOINES
Telephone:
4–0317

Corrected to May 20, 1951

NORTH BOUND

Miles	STATIONS	No. 1 Daily	No. 3 Daily
	Lv. East Seventh & Court	am	pm
.0	East Des Moines -----	7:10	4:10
1.4	Lv. Dean Avenue --------	f 7:13	f4:13
5.6	Lv. Swanwood ----------	f 7:22	f4:22
9.2	Lv. Oralabor ----------	f 7:26	f4:26
11.3	Lv. Ankeny ----------	7:30	4:30
17.5	Lv. Alleman ----------	7:39	4:39
22.5	Lv. Huxley ----------	7:46	4:46
24.9	Lv. Midvale ----------	f 7:50	f4:50
28.4	Lv. Kelley ----------	7:55	4:55
31.5	Lv. Napier ----------	f 8:00	f5:00
36.8	Lv. Ericson ----------	f 8:09	f5:09
42.4	Ar. Boone ----------	8:20	5:20
	Lv. Boone ----------	8:30	5:30
50.6	Lv. Fraser ----------	8:50	5:50
53.7	Lv. Wolf ----------	f 8:57	f5:57
58.7	Lv. Boxholm ----------	9:06	6:06
62.8	Lv. Hope ----------	9:11	6:11
66.7	Lv. Harcourt ----------	9:16	6:16
71.0	Lv. Palm Grove ----------	f 9:22	f6:22
73.9	Lv. Lundgren ----------	f 9:26	f6:26
78.0	Lv. Roberts ----------	f 9:32	f6:32
80.0	Lv. Shady Oak ----------	f 9:39	f6:39
84.8	Ar. Fort Dodge ----------	9:50	6:50
		am	pm

f. Denotes flag stop.

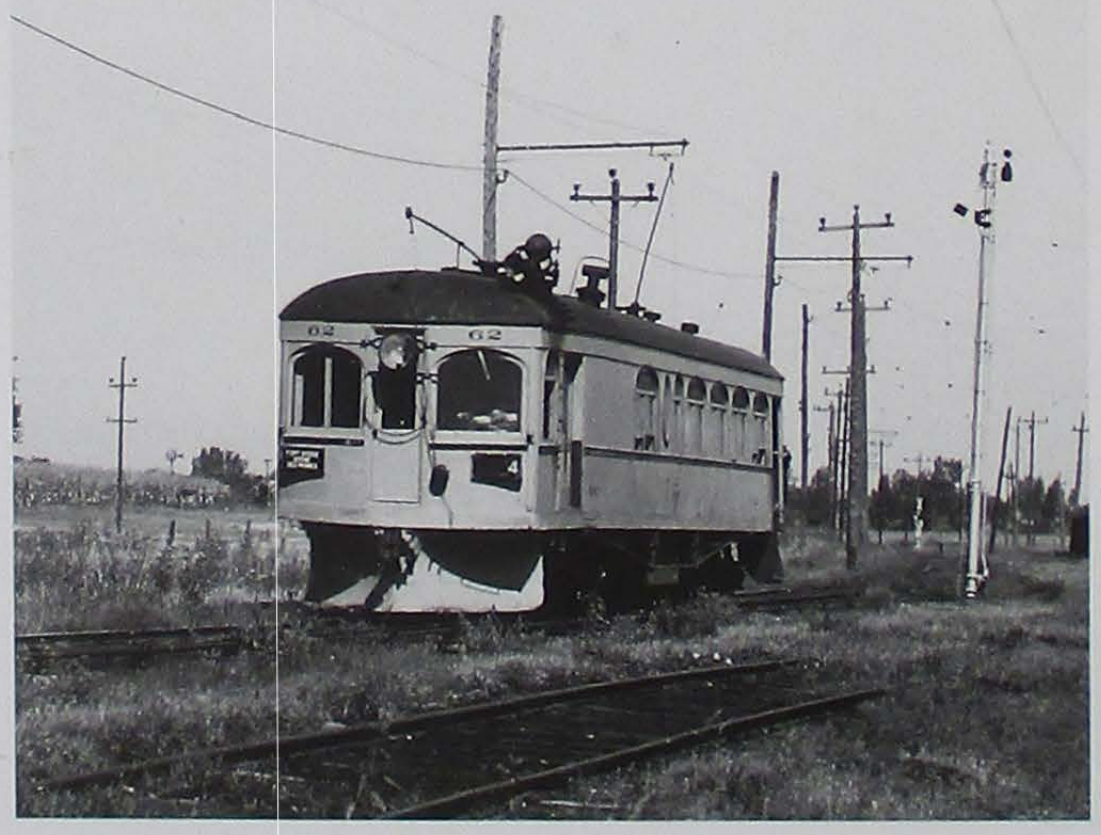
Corrected to May 20, 1951

SOUTH BOUND

Miles	STATIONS	No. 2 Daily	No. 4 Daily
		am	pm
.0	Lv. Fort Dodge ----------	7:10	4:10
4.8	Lv. Shady Oak ----------	f 7:21	f4:21
6.8	Lv. Roberts ----------	f 7:28	f4:28
10.9	Lv. Lundgren ----------	f 7:33	f4:33
13.8	Lv. Palm Grove ----------	f 7:37	f4:37
18.1	Lv. Harcourt ----------	7:43	4:43
22.0	Lv. Hope ----------	7:48	4:48
26.1	Lv. Boxholm ----------	7:54	4:54
31.1	Lv. Wolf ----------	f 8:03	f5:03
34.2	Lv. Fraser ----------	8:10	5:10
42.4	Ar. Boone ----------	8:30	5:30
	Lv. Boone ----------	8:35	5:35
48.0	Lv. Ericson ----------	f 8:44	f5:44
53.3	Lv. Napier ----------	f 8:51	f5:51
56.4	Lv. Kelley ----------	8:57	5:57
59.9	Lv. Midvale ----------	f 9:02	f6:02
62.3	Lv. Huxley ----------	9:07	6:07
67.3	Lv. Alleman ----------	9:15	6:15
73.5	Lv. Ankeny ----------	9:25	6:25
75.6	Lv. Oralabor ----------	f 9:29	f6:29
79.2	Lv. Swanwood ----------	f 9:33	f6:33
83.4	Lv. Dean Avenue --------	f 9:42	f6:42
84.8	Ar. East Des Moines -----	9:50	6:50
	E. Seventh & Court	am	pm

f. Denotes flag stop.

Above: By 1951 passenger service had been reduced to two round trips between Des Moines and Fort Dodge. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*



Above: Car 62 scurries along near the C&NW crossing at Harcourt on September 12, 1946. *William C, Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: Prairie meet. Cars 62 and 74 in May 1951. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: Crossing the Des Moines River south of Fort Dodge required impressive bridgework. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: A time-honored tradition. Closed pouch mail delivered to car 82 at Des Moines. *Anthony F. Krisak photo; Richard A. Krisak collection*

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Company

Total Mileage: 150 Miles
General Offices: Boone, Iowa

GENERAL OFFICERS

WALTER R. DYER - - *President and General Counsel*
Boone, Iowa
C. M. KELLY - *Vice-President and General Manager*
Boone, Iowa
FRED M. STEELE - *Asst. Vice-President*, Boone, Iowa
JOHN L. HUGG - *Secretary*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
EDWARD R. LEWIS - - *Traffic Manager*, Boone, Iowa
IRA A. SWANDER - *Auditor and Treasurer*, Boone, Iowa
F. H. BOSTWICK - - *Superintendent*, Boone, Iowa

TRAFFIC

EDWARD R. LEWIS - - *Traffic Manager*, Boone, Iowa
JACK E. WHEELES - *Assistant General Freight Agent*
Room 1101–1102 Utilities Building
327 South La Salle Street, Chicago 4, Illinois
J. E. RENQUIST - - *General Agent*, Fort Dodge, Iowa
S. J. KARTHAUS - - *General Agent*, Des Moines, Iowa
H. F. WELIN - *Traveling Freight Agent*, Boone, Iowa
P. D. ROBERTSON *Asst. to Traffic Manager*, Boone, Iowa

OPERATING

F. H. BOSTWICK - - - *Superintendent*, Boone, Iowa
R. L. COOPER - - - *Chief Engineer*, Boone, Iowa
DR W. H. LONGWORTH - *Chief Surgeon*, Boone, Iowa
E. B. LEEO - - - *Purchasing Agent*, Boone, Iowa
JOE R. TEAGARDEN - *Master Mechanic*, Boone, Iowa
H. H. EVERTS - - *Electrical Engineer*, Boone, Iowa
J. F. GAGNON - *Supt., Terminals*, Fort Dodge, Iowa

ACCOUNTING

IRA A. SWANDER - *Auditor and Treasurer*, Boone, Iowa
RALPH G. ADES - - *Assistant Treasurer*, Boone, Iowa
W. A. CURRAN - - *Assistant Secretary*, Boone, Iowa

FREIGHT TRAIN SERVICE

Four-motor, Eighty-ton Freight Engine

Freight train service daily from Des Moines to Fort Dodge, Iowa:

DAILY EXCEPT SATURDAY

Leave Des Moines - - -	11:15 p.m.
Arrive Fort Dodge - - -	6:25 a.m.

DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAY

Leave Des Moines - - -	7:15 p.m.
Arrive Fort Dodge - - -	4:30 a.m.

Freight train service daily from Fort Dodge to Des Moines, Iowa:

DAILY EXCEPT SATURDAY

Leave Fort Dodge - - -	11:45 p.m.
Arrive Des Moines - - -	6:35 a.m.

DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAY

Leave Fort Dodge - - - -	10:00 p.m.
Arrive Des Moines - - - -	4:30 a.m.

Daily except Saturday and Sunday between Webster City, Lehigh, and Fort Dodge, Iowa:

Leave Fort Dodge - - -	9:30 p.m.
Arrive Webster City - - -	10:55 p.m.
Leave Webster City - - -	11:45 p.m.
Arrive Fort Dodge via Lehigh -	3:45 a.m.

SATURDAY ONLY

Leave Fort Dodge - - -	7:35 p.m.
Arrive Webster City - - -	11:40 p.m.

Daily except Saturday to Rockwell City from all points between Des Moines and Fort Dodge, Iowa:

Arrive Rockwell City - - -	6:10 a.m.

Making connections with C. M. St. P. & P. R. R. for points north.

Leave Rockwell City - - -	6:55 a.m.
Arrive Boone - - - -	10:20 a.m.

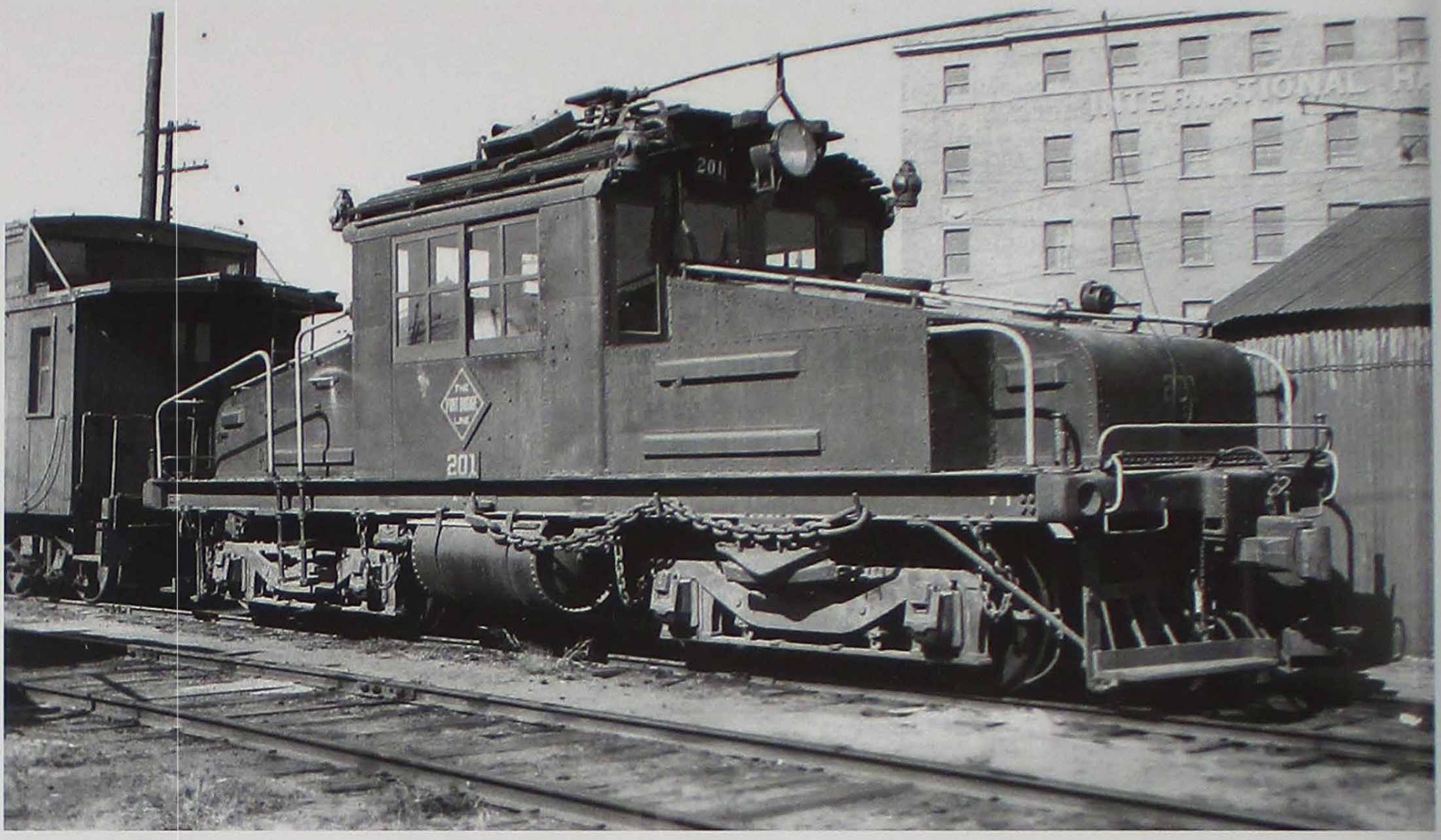
Above: *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Freight Operation

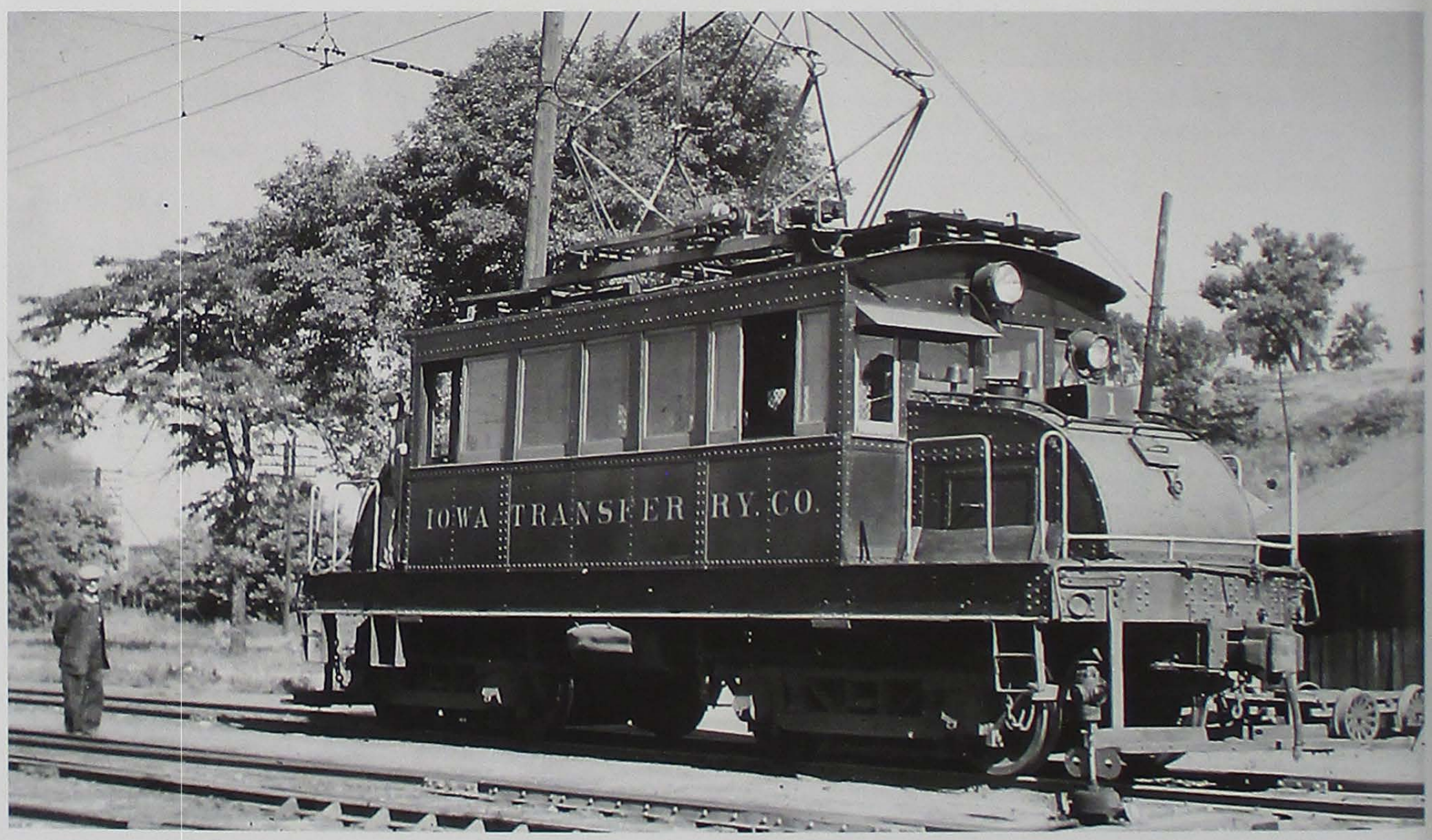
Above: Freight volumes during the Great Depression were extremely discouraging. On September 24, 1939, boxcab 207 awaited an assignment at Des Moines. *John F. Humiston photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: Sister unit 205 rattles through Boone on September 20, 1947. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern evolved from a steam railroad basically designed to move freight with little emphasis on the passenger side of business. Subsequent construction and electrification likewise followed steam railroad standards and traditions. That meant, in part, track connections to and from other carriers to encourage and permit the interchange of carload freight traffic coupled with agreements with other roads for rates and divisions as well as car hire. This process risked being short-hauled by shippers who were swayed by connecting carriers, but over time FDDM&S developed very substantial online billings—agricultural commodities, livestock, clay, shale, coal, brick, tile, and especially plaster products. The result of this was that the big steam roads proved anxious to work out traffic arrangements that were mutually advantageous. Those connecting roads would then deliver to the Fort Dodge Line's online customers lumber,



Above: Among the heaviest of the Fort Dodge Line's steeplecabs was 201, resting between assignments. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*



Above: Iowa Transfer served the collective needs of several steam roads at Des Moines—essentially a transfer carrier for carload freight. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

petroleum products, foodstuffs, and all manner of manufactured goods and merchandise. On its own hook, FDDM&S increased it freight car inventory to a full 2,462 units by 1918—mostly boxcars. These were more than adequate to meet local needs and would for many years provide car-hire revenue. [8]

Additional very welcome non-operating revenue derived from the sale to area customers of electric power from the Fraser generating plant that was excess to the railroad's needs. [9]

The agricultural recession of the 1920s, the brutal Great Depression and awful drought of the 1930s worked their collective woe on FDDM&S as might be expected. Passenger revenues slumped in the 1920s and plummeted in the following decade to put great stress on freight carriage to pay the bills and keep the road in business. Those dark days finally passed but an increase in demand in freight service that might have been expected as a consequence of World War II did not develop. With the end of hostilities, however, there was reason to be optimistic. [10]

Above: Passenger meets freight at East Fort Dodge, May 1951. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Above: Iowa's state capitol building looms in the background of FDL's Des Moines terminal in this view from the late 1930s. *Robert V. Mehlenbeck photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Indeed, there was a pronounced pent-up consumer demand for all nature of durable goods and housing of every sort. That, in turn, meant burgeoning orders to the road's trackside brick and tile works and especially for the several gypsum mills served by the interurban near Fort Dodge. FDDM&S carloads handled jumped from 19,227 in 1944 to 29,701 in 1948. To move that tonnage the company typically scheduled twice-daily trains in each direction over the main line, one on each of the branches. Not surprisingly, all of it put great stress on the company's now elderly motive power. This led management to acquire three unusual and husky four-truck electric locomotives from Oregon Electric when the latter dieselized in 1947. These big fellows could handle twice the tonnage of the older steeple cabs and were greatly welcomed when freight volumes totaled 121,570 carloads for the four-year period 1950-1953. Diesels were ordered for switching duties at

Above: Caboose 80 awaits a night freight run. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Motor 113 slumbers at Des Moines as one of the road's passenger cars in the background readies for the run to Fort Dodge. *Bro. Bernard Polinak, S.J. photo; Collection of Richard A. Krisak*

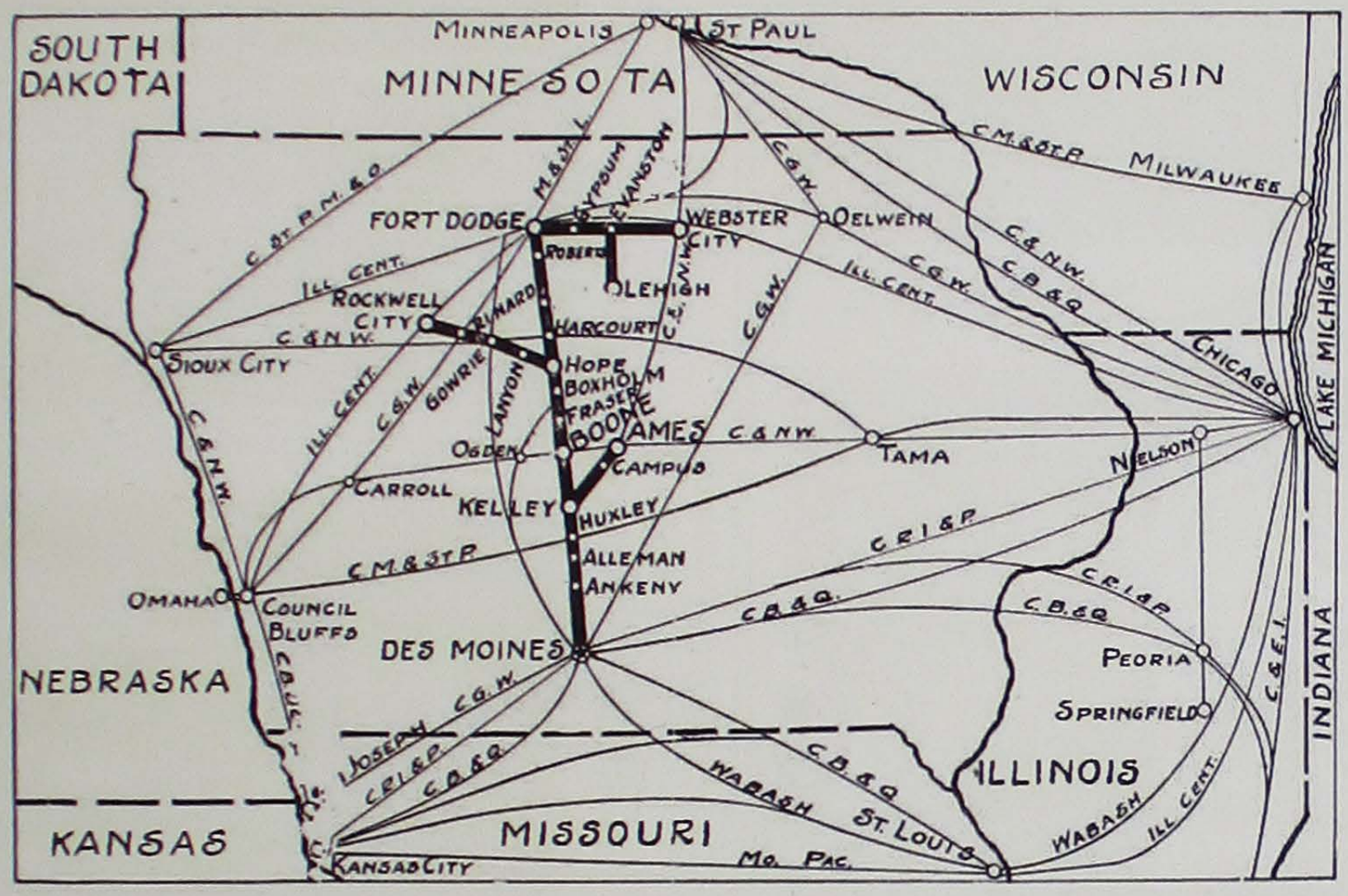
FOR GOOD SERVICE

Route your freight via the following lines in connection with the FORT DODGE, DES MOINES & SOUTHERN RAILWAY

To	
Ames, Iowa	C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash.
Ankeny, Iowa	C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash.
Boone, Iowa	C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash.

To	
Des Moines, Iowa	Illinois Central via Fort Dodge, Iowa; C. & N. W. via Ames, Iowa; C. M. St. P. & P. via Huxley, Iowa. M. & St. L. via Fort Dodge, Iowa.
Fort Dodge, Iowa	C. & N. W., C. B. & Q., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., Wabash.
Gowrie, Iowa	C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. M. St. P. & P., Ill. Central, Wabash.

Route Car Load Freight via the Routes Shown Here for Good Service.



Route Your Less Than Car Load Shipments via These Routes. Good Service with Pick-up and Delivery at No Expense to You or Your Customers.

To	
Harcourt, Iowa	C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash.
Huxley, Iowa	C. & N. W., C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash.
Kelley, Iowa	C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash.
Lehigh, Iowa	C. & N. W., C. B. & Q., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash, C. G. W.
Rinard, Iowa	C. & N. W., C. B. & Q., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R. I. & P., Ill. Central, M. & St. L., Wabash.
Rockwell City, Iowa	C. & N. W., C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. R. I. & P., M. & St. L., Wabash.
Webster City, Iowa	C. B. & Q., C. G. W., C. M. St. P. & P., C. R.

GRAIN ELEVATORS

located on the

FORT DODGE, DES MOINES & SOUTHERN

Fort Dodge	Wolf	Alleman
Roberts	Quaker Oats Company	Piper
Lanyon	Boone	Gowrie
Lundgren	Ericson	Rockwell City
Palm Grove	Napier	Evanston
Boxholm	Kelley	Brushy

Above: *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Fort Dodge, the Lehigh-Webster City branch, and later for the Rockwell City branch. Mainline trains, said management, would remain electrically powered. [11]

Then came the terrible flood of June 1954 that washed out portions of main line track and, much more importantly, knocked out the recently renovated power plant at Fraser. Partial freight service resumed a few days later using mostly borrowed diesel units; it would not be until November that mainline freight trains returned to being drawn almost exclusively by electric power. That pattern, as it turned out, would only last on a short-term basis. For the Fort Dodge Line, nothing good came out of that nasty June flood; one issue hinged on another. The hammer would fall again in 1954 when the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern was sold to Des Moines & Central Iowa, itself owned by scrap dealer and short line railroad operator Murray Salzburg. Both passenger service and electric operation ended the following year while 1956 saw the sale of the power plant at Fraser as well as the power system and its franchise. [12]

What remained was a relatively healthy dieselized short line carrier with substantial revenues derived in particular from gypsum plants near Fort Dodge. Life as a Salzburg property came to an end in 1968 when both FDDM&S and DM&CI were acquired by the Chicago & North Western Railway. Between 1968 and 1983 both lines were cut back by C&NW in small increments with the last freight service ending in 1983. [13]

Above: Elderly motor 111 snuggles up next to former Oregon Electric four-truck freighter, now FDL's 360. Des Moines, August 20, 1955. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive.*

Above: FDL's well worn 119 grinds upgrade southbound from Fraser. April 11, 1953. *Henry M. Stange photo;. Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: View of the same train passing as it makes its way toward Boone. *Henry M. Stange photo;. Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Freight paid the bills. Nearly home, 119 approaches the Boone yard, April 11, 1953. *Henry M. Stange photo. Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Completely new complexion, FtDDM&S in new guise, all diesel and living on borrowed time. Boone, September 8, 1961. T*om Nixon photo; Chicago & North Western Historical Society*

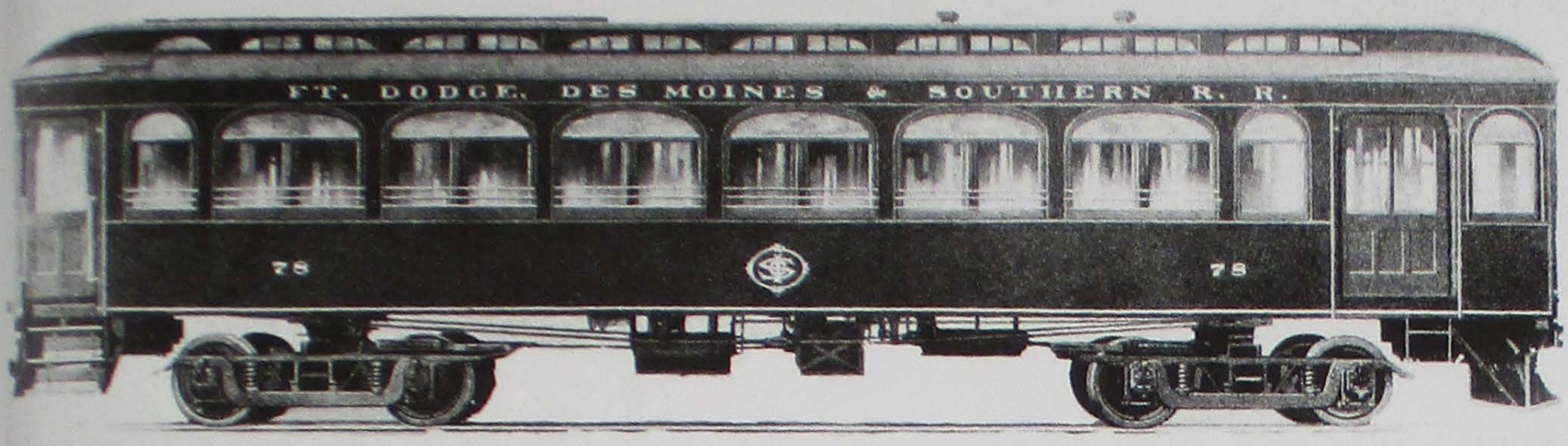

74
74
FORT DODGE
BOONE
DES MOINES

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Equipment Rosters

Number	Builder	Built	Trucks	Motors	Cntrl	Weight	Seats	Length	Width	Height	Scrapped	Notes
Interurban Cars												
7 (1st)											1954	Business Car, ex-Wichita Falls & Southern
7 (2nd)	Pullman							80'-0"				Business Car, ex-Mt. Foraker
34												Double-end open observation car converted to work service.
36	McGuire-Cummings	1916						50'-0"				Open-end parlor observation trailer
38	Jewett	1912						52'-3"	8'-8"			Open-end parlor observation
40 (1st), 42												Ex-Pennsylvania RR coaches
44,46		1913									1929	
48		1929									1932	
40 (2nd)	Company Shops	1911	Baldwin	2-GE206A		58,000					1928	Rebuilt from baggage car, office car in 1913, coach in 1914 for branchline service.
50	McGuire-Cummings	1908		2-GE206A								
52	American	1916	Brill 27MCB	2-GE206A			36	42'-2"	9'-10"	12'-11"	1932	Center-entrance branchline car
54	McGuire-Cummings	1916		2-GE205E				42'-2"				Center-entrance branchline car, sold 1932 to St. Francois County Ry.
56				2-GE205E								Acquired by 1925
60											1913	Ex-N&NW baggage coach, no. 60
62 (1st)											1916	Ex-N&NW baggage coach, no. 62
62 (2nd)	American	1916	Brill 27MCB	4-GE205E				55'-2"	9'-10"	12'-11"	1956	
64-82 (even no.)	Niles	1907	Baldwin 84-25	4-GE205E	M	75,000	50	53'-4"	9'-4"	13'-1"		Cars 68 and 70 destroyed in wrecks; cars 66, 72, 74, 82 out of service 1956 and scrapped except for 72 destroyed by fire in 1968. Disposition of cars 64, 76, 78, and 80 unknown.
84	Niles	1907		2-GE217				53"-0"			1956	Express Motor rebuilt to line car early 1920s
100	McGuire-Cummings	1908										Express motor equipped with snowplows; used as signal dept. work car.
Locomotives												
99	Company Shops											Single-truck locomotive, wooden steeple cab
101	GE (?)		Single									Box cab reported sold 1910 to Des Moines Rys.
103	Baldwin	1909	Baldwin	4-WH							1954	Rebuilt 1911 for 1200 volts, renumbered 107 (2nd)
105	Baldwin	1909	Baldwin	4-WH							1954	Rebuilt 1911 for 1200 volts, renumbered 109 (2nd)
107 (1st)	Baldwin	1910	Baldwin	4-WH								Sold 1911 to Chatham Wallaceburg & Lake Erie
109 (1st)	Baldwin	1910	Baldwin	4-WH							1950	Sold 1911 to Interurban Ry. Co.
107 (2nd)	Baldwin	1909	Baldwin	4-GE206A	M	85,000						
109 (2nd)	Baldwin	1909	Baldwin	4-GE206A		85,000						
111	GE/American Loco.	1911	Amer. Loco.	4-GE206A		80,000		38'-1"	9'-6"	12'-8"	1956	
113	GE/American Loco.	1911	Amer. Loco.	4-GE206A		80,000		38'-1"	9'-6"	12'-8"		
115	GE/American Loco.	1911	Amer. Loco.	4-GE206A		80,000		38'-1"	9'-6"	12'-8"		
117	GE/American Loco.	1912	Amer. Loco.	4-GE206A		80,000			9'-6"	12'-8"	1956	
119	GE/American Loco.	1912	Amer. Loco.	4-GE206A		80,000		38'-1"	9'-6"	12'-8"	1956	
201	GE/American Loco.	1912	Amer. Loco.	4-GE		120,000					1954	

Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway Equipment Rosters (con't)

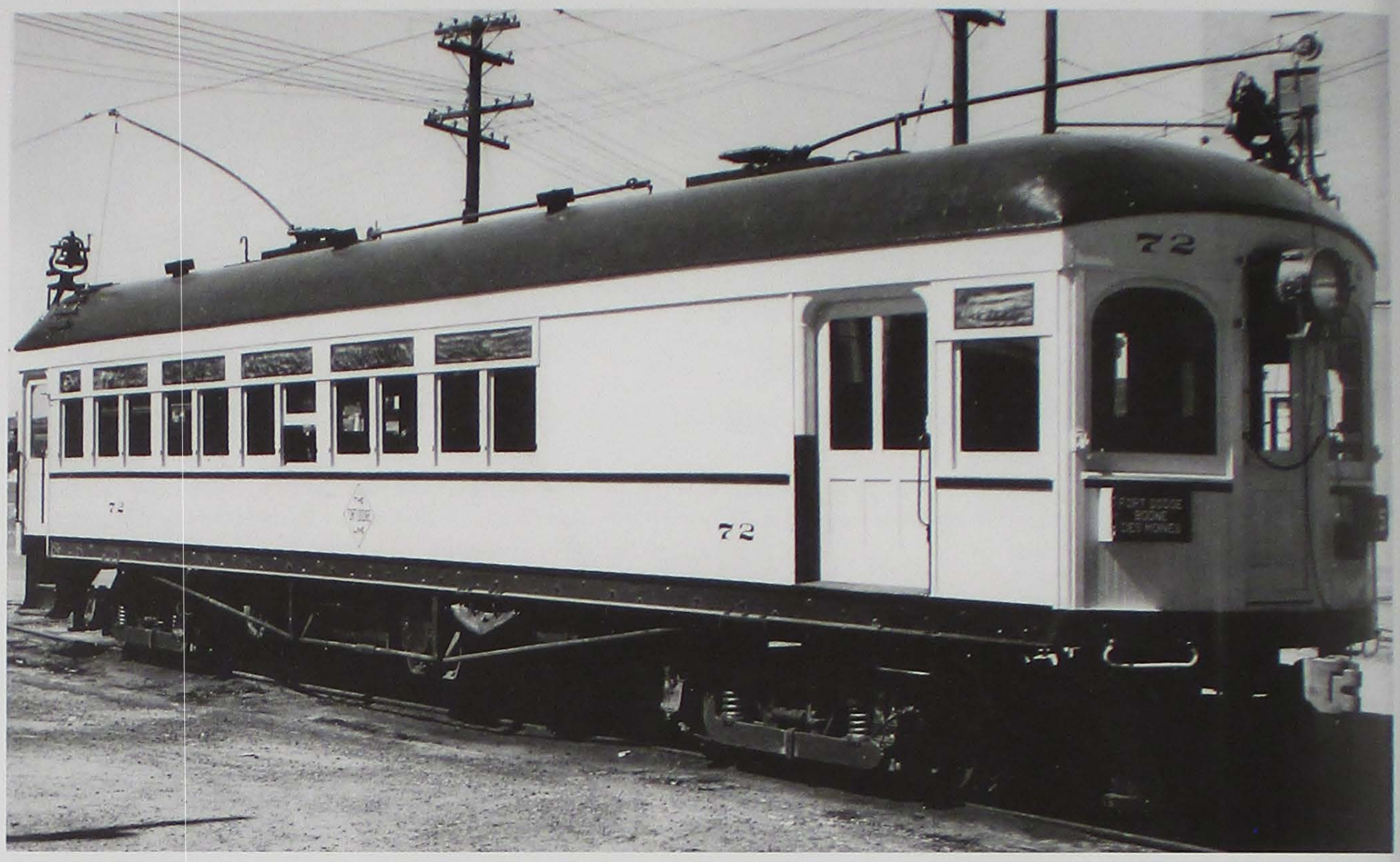
Number	Builder	Built	Trucks	Motors	Cntrl	Weight	Seats	Length	Width	Height	Scrapped	Notes
Locomotives *(con't)*												
205	GE	1915	Amer. Loco.	4-GE251		120,000					1956	
207	GE	1915	Amer. Loco.	4-GE251		120,000					1956	
208	McGuire-Cummings	1914	Mc-G.	4-WH308E3	HL	120,000		35'-0"	9'-1"	13'-1"	1956	Ex-Iowa Transfer acq. 1950, ex-WCF&N 180
209	GE	1929		HM-818-B-1	PCL	150,000		37'-0"	10'-4"	14'-3"	1956	
360	Oregon Electric	1942	Baldwin	8-GE205	M	182,300		58'-2"	9'-6"	12'-8"	1957	Acquired from Oregon Electric in 1947, ex-60
361	Oregon Electric	1942	Baldwin	8-GE205	M	182,300		58'-2"	9'-6"	12'-8"	1957	Acquired from Oregon Electric in 1947, ex-61
362	Oregon Electric	1944	Baldwin	8-GE205	M	182,300		58'-2"	9'-6"	12'-8"	1957	Acquired from Oregon Electric in 1947, ex-62
Diesels												
401	GE	1953		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Sold in 1969 to A. Merilee Ltd., Toronto (dealer)
402	GE	1954		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Sold in 1969 to Merilee, resold to Hudson Bay Mining, Flin Flon Manitoba as No. 8
403	GE	1955		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Sold to Merilee in 1970
404	GE	1955		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Sold to Merilee in 1969, resold to HBM as No. 6
405	GE	1955		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Sold to Merilee in 1969, resold to HBM as No. 9
406	GE	1955		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Sold to Merilee in 1969, resold to HBM as No. 7
407	GE	1948		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Acquired 1961, ex-Tallulah Falls 501; sold 1969
408	GE	1948		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Acquired 1961, ex-Tallulah Falls 502; sold 1969
409	GE	1950		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Acquired 1962, ex-MKT 1654; sold to Merilee 1970
410	GE	1950		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Acquired 1961, ex-Arkansas & Ozarks 800, Sold to Merilee 1970, resold 1970 to Pikington Bros. Ltd., Scarborough, Ont.
411	GE	1950		4-GE748		140,000		37'-0"	10'-0"	13'-5"		Acquired 1961, ex-A&D 900 sold 1970, IREX 411, resold 1972 as Santa Maria Valley 80
501	Plymouth	1936				130,000						Diesel model PE originally Joplin & Pittsburgh 2003. Acquired 1954, sold 1956. Later donated to Museum of Transport, St. Louis
502	GE	1941		2-GE733		88,000		28'-4"	9'-6"	12'-0"		Acquired 1957, ex-NYO&W 102, Mississippi Export 47, Fernwood, Columbia & Gulf D6
503	GE	1941		2-GE733		88,000		28'-4"	9'-6"	12'-0"		Acquired 1957, ex-NYO&W 103, FC&G D5, sold 1970 IREX 503
504	GE	1945		2-GE733		88,000		28'-4"	9'-6"	12'-0"		Acquired 1957, ex-FC&G D1; sold 1962 to Raymond Int. (Liberia)
505	GE	1945		2-GE733		88,000		28'-4"	9'-6"	12'-0"		Acquired 1957, ex-FC&G D2; sold 1962 to Raymond Int. (Liberia)
Ft. Dodge City Cars												
10	Laclede	1896	Single	2							1918	Reworked for shuttle service on Ogden branch circa 1908 or 1909. Stored at Boone around 1910.
20, 30		1902	Double	4							1913	One car possibly transferred to Ames in 1909.
90	American	1909	Double	4								Scrapped after 1925.
92	American	1909	Double	4								Renumbered to 95 in 1916.
94 (1st)	Jewett	1912	Double	4								Transferred to Ames, renumbered as 288 in 1916.
94 (2nd)	St. Louis	1917	Single	2								Possibly renumbered to 97.
95	American	1909	Double	4								Rebuilt from 92 in 1916 to 1200 volts for miner accommodations from Ft. Dodge.
96, 98	McGuire-Cummings	1916 (?)	Single	2				42'-6"				Not absolutely certain as to correct builder.
97			Single	2								Either a renumbering of car 94 (2nd) or new car similar to 96, 98.
99	American	1916	Single	2			32	31'-10"	8'-0"	11'-4"		Scrapped between 1925 and 1929.
Ames City Cars												
86	St. Louis	1907	St. Louis	4-GE80		46,000	40	41'-0"	8'-6"	11'-4"	1914	Renumbered 286 before 1912; destroyed by fire 1914
88	St. Louis	1907	St. Louis	4-GE80		46,000	40	41'-0"	8'-6"	11'-4"	1925	Renumbered 87 circa 1908-09; renumbered 287 before 1912.
288	Jewett	1912	Double	4				40'-1"			1932	Transferred from Ft. Dodge (94-1st) in 1916
289	Jewett	1912	Double	4				40'-1"			1932	Assigned new to Ames but built on same order as 288.
290-292	Brill			4-WH306	K36						1932	3 cars transferred from Ft. Dodge (94-99 group) in 1925



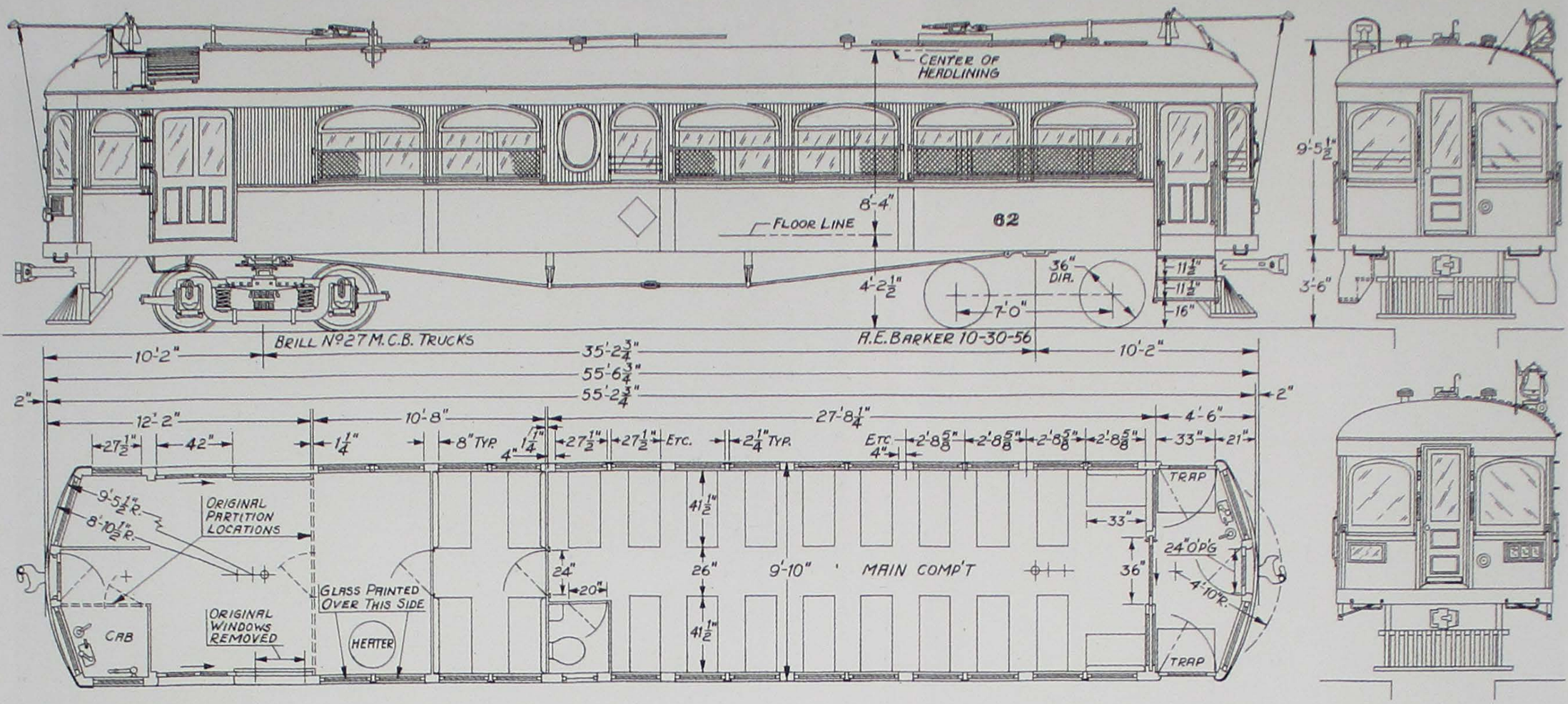
Above: To commence passenger operations in 1907, Fort Dodge Line received ten handsome wood cars built by Niles Car Company. The new cars were 53 feet 4 inches long with a width of 9 feet 4 inches. They were mounted on Baldwin 84-25 trucks with four GE205E motors. As delivered cars were painted in a dark green. *CERA Archives*

Right: In the 1930s Fort Dodge Line began a program of extensively rebuilding the cars. The clerestory roofs were replaced with arch roofs, the arch windows were squared off, underframes were strengthened, and the cars were completely rewired. By the time Bill Janssen visited the Boone yards in June 1935, car 65 was the only one still retaining its original roof. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Right: Results of the rebuilding program are shown in a photo of car 82 taken on the same date. The original dark green livery had been now replaced by a dull boxcar red. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*



Above: In later years Fort Dodge Line repainted its cars in a bright canary yellow, with a few more receiving additional olive green trim around window frames and doors. Top photo shows No. 72 at Des Moines in September 1947 while in the bottom photo, No. 70 sits at Boone between assignments.
Top: *George Krambles photo; Norman Carlson collection*; **Bottom:** *Raymond DeGroote photo*



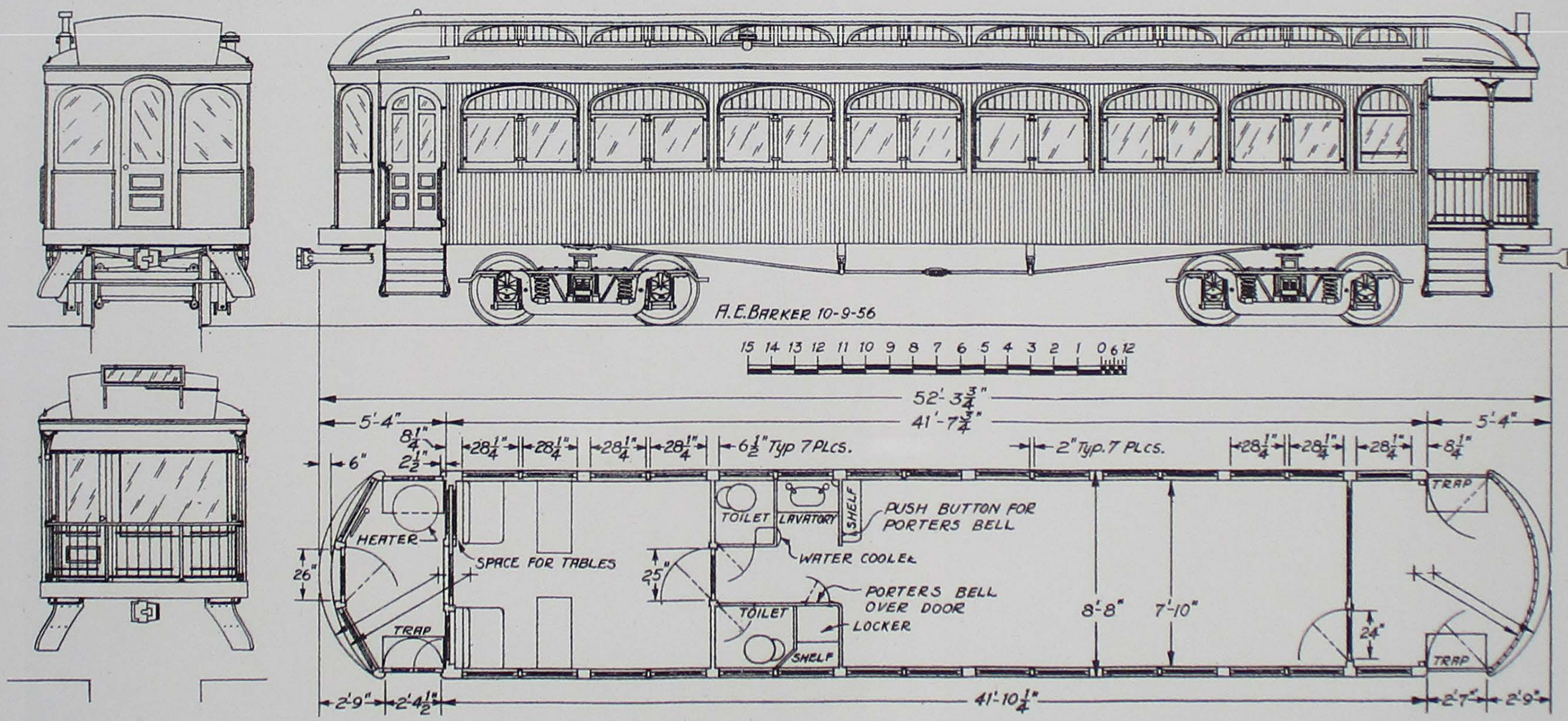
Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway
Combination Passenger-Baggage Motor Car No. 62
Built by the American Car Company 1916
Scale 1:87
Drawing by A. E. Barker

Above: In 1916 Fort Dodge Line purchased an additional passenger car from the American Car Company. This car bore little resemblance to the others on the roster being built with steel sheathing and an arch roof. The car was longer—55 feet 2 inches—and wider at 9 feet 10 inches. Like the others, it was equipped with four GE205E motors, but on Brill 27 MCB trucks. This July 1940 photo displays the car in the dull red of the period. *Frank E. Butts photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Left: Builder's view of car 62's interior shows that of a car built to be solid and functional rather than ornate. The width the car really gave it a "steam road" appearance. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

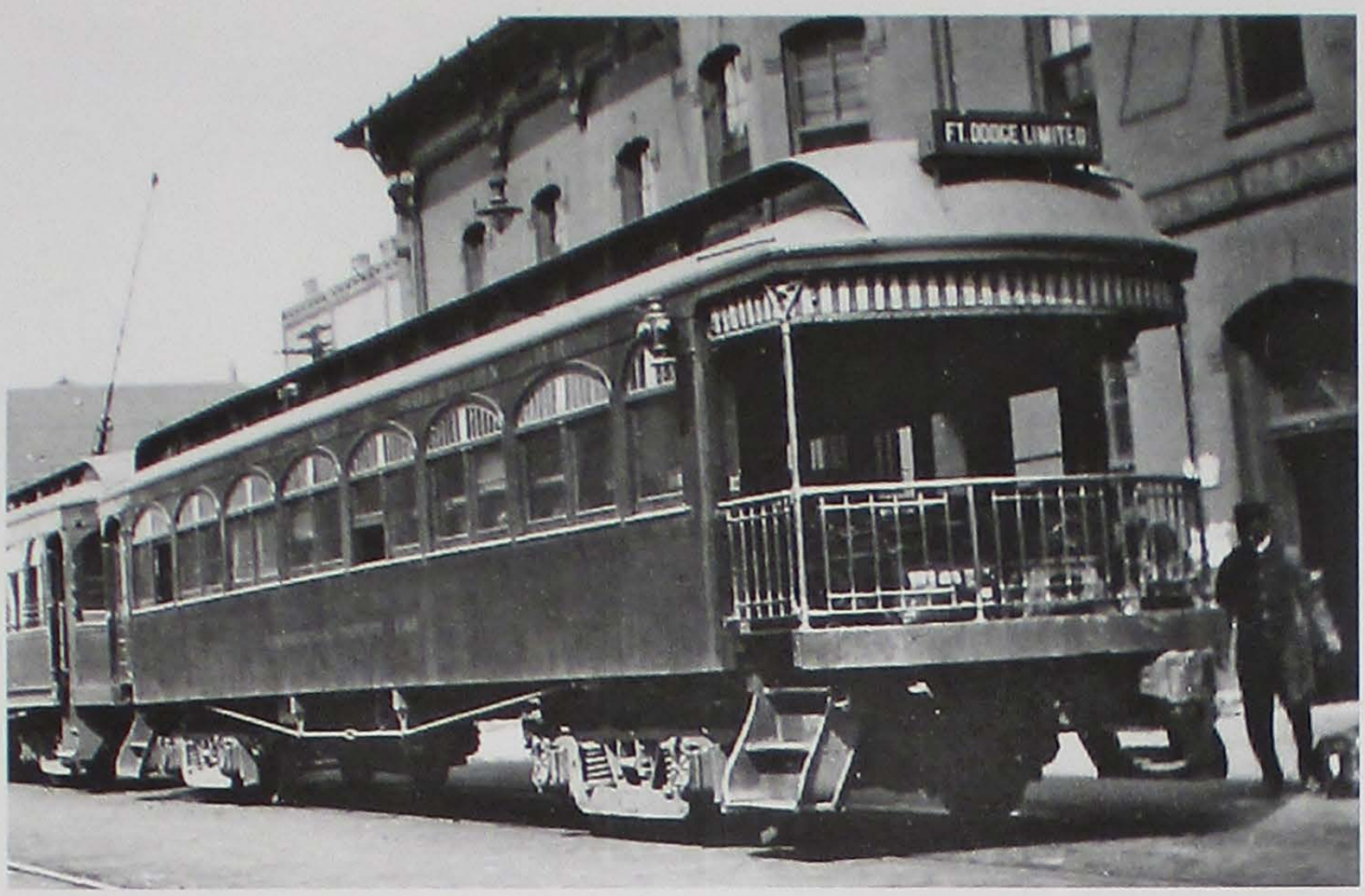
Above: Broadside view of No. 62 in 1939. Unlike the other FDL cars whose arch windows were squared off, No. 62's windows remained as they were built. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

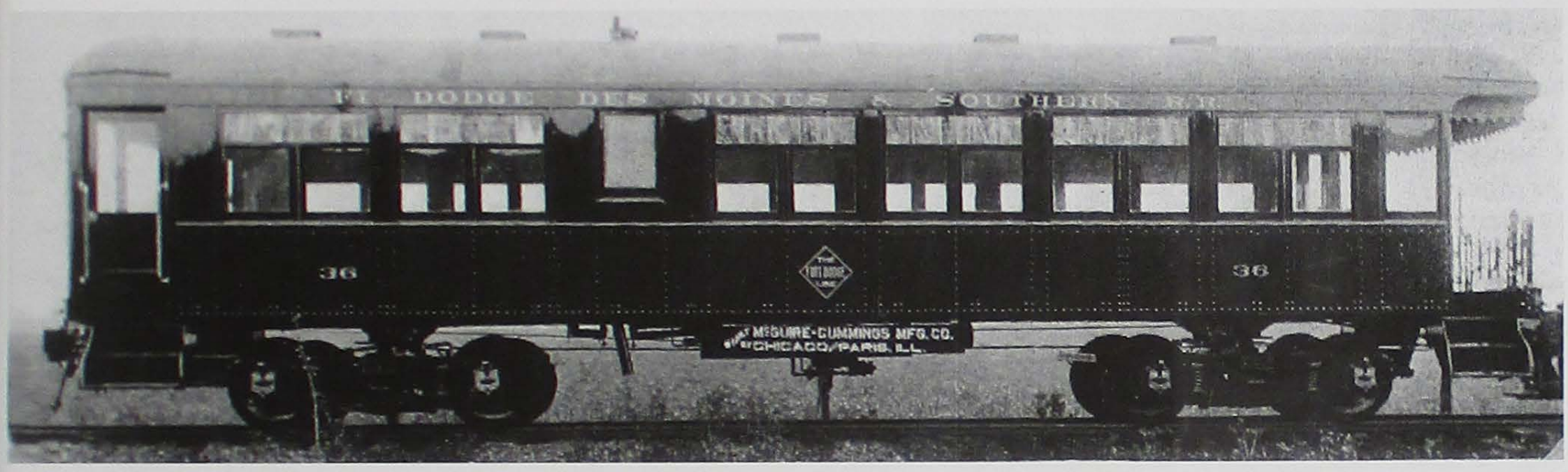
Above: Over the years car 62 was a favorite to be found on many fantrips. Here at Fort Dodge the car negotiates the reverse loop that was installed when street running ended in 1940. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*



Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway
Observation-Parlor Car
Built by the Jewett Car Company 1912
Scale 1:87
Drawing by A. E. Barker

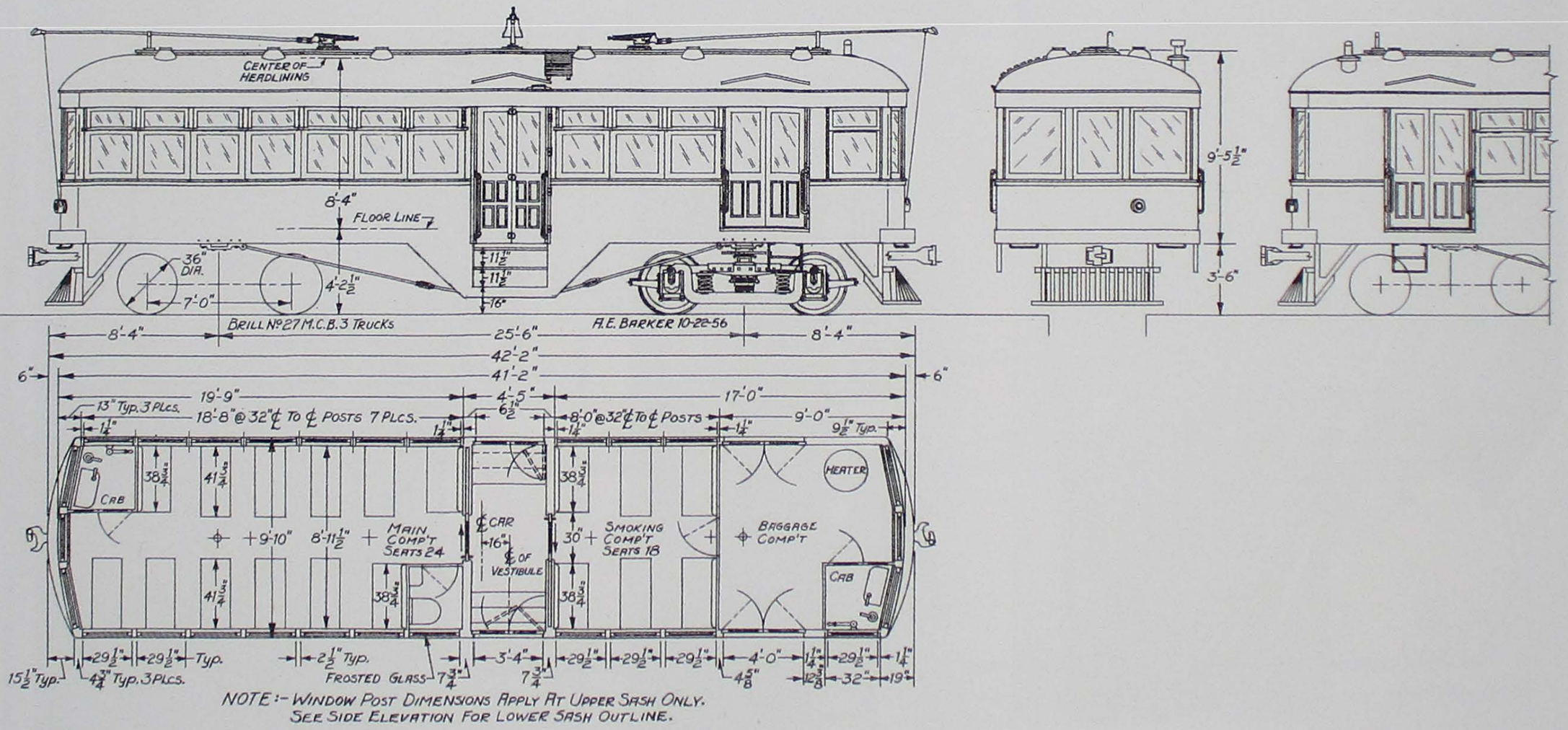
Right: The Fort Dodge Line strove to match competing steam road luxury with its own parlor-observation car service. The car shown here is believed to be No. 38, a Jewett product. For an additional 25 cents, a passenger could enjoy the comfort of a parlor car seat and porter service. The open observation platform afforded a cinder-free view of the countryside.





Above: A more modern all-steel parlor observation was built for FDL by McGuire-Cummings in 1916. Its service life was short as parlor service ended in the winter of 1931-32. *CERA Archives*

Above: By 1935 parlor no. 36 had been out of service for several years and was in derelict condition in the Boone yards. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*



NOTE :- WINDOW POST DIMENSIONS APPLY AT UPPER SASH ONLY.
SEE SIDE ELEVATION FOR LOWER SASH OUTLINE.

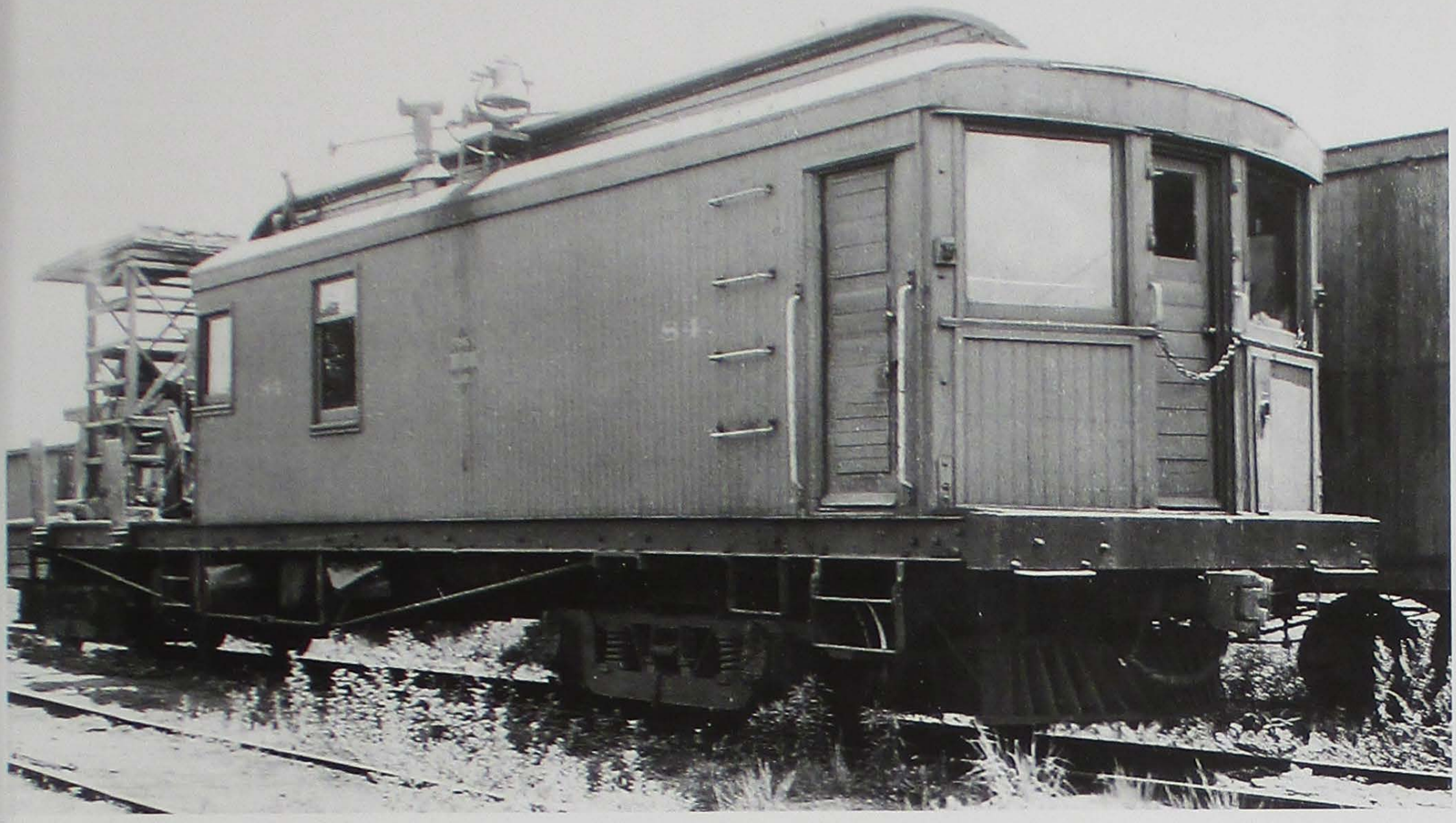
Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway
Combination Passenger-Baggage Motor Car No. 52
Built by the American Car Company 1916
Scale 1:87
Drawing by A. E. Barker

Above: For branch line service, Fort Dodge Line had converted one car (No. 50) into a combination baggage-coach, center entrance car; this was assigned to the Rockwell City branch. No. 52 was purchased new from the American Car Company in 1916 and placed in service on the Ames branch. Even these small capacity cars were more than ample to handle the actual ridership. Passenger service to Rockwell City ended in 1926 while service to Ames lasted two more years, ending in 1928. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

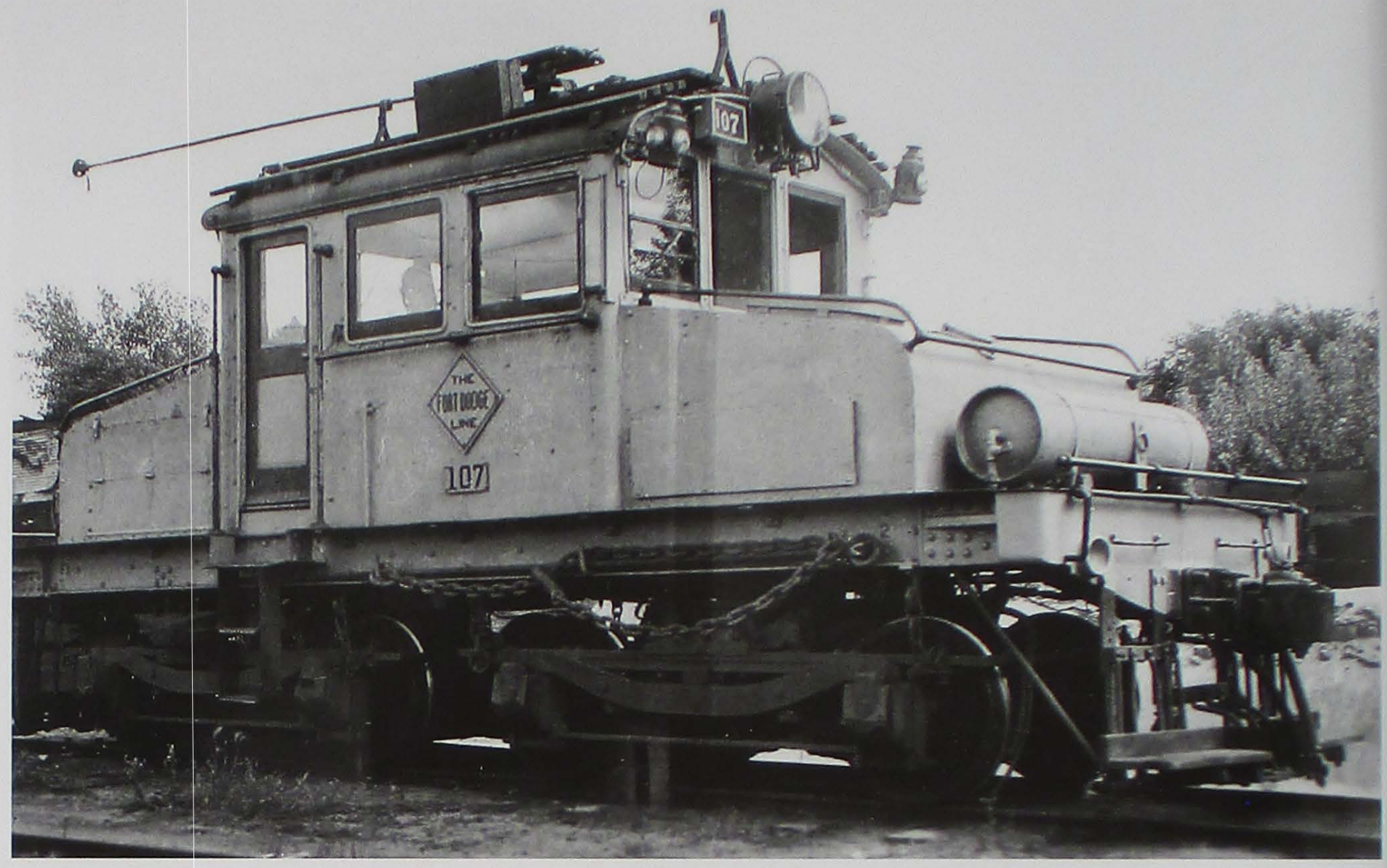
Above: The interior of No. 52, shown in this builder's photo, could only be described as utilitarian. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: A walk around the Boone yard would turn up old discards "repurposed" for other uses. Double open-end observation car no. 34 had long since seen its last passenger and had been converted to work service. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

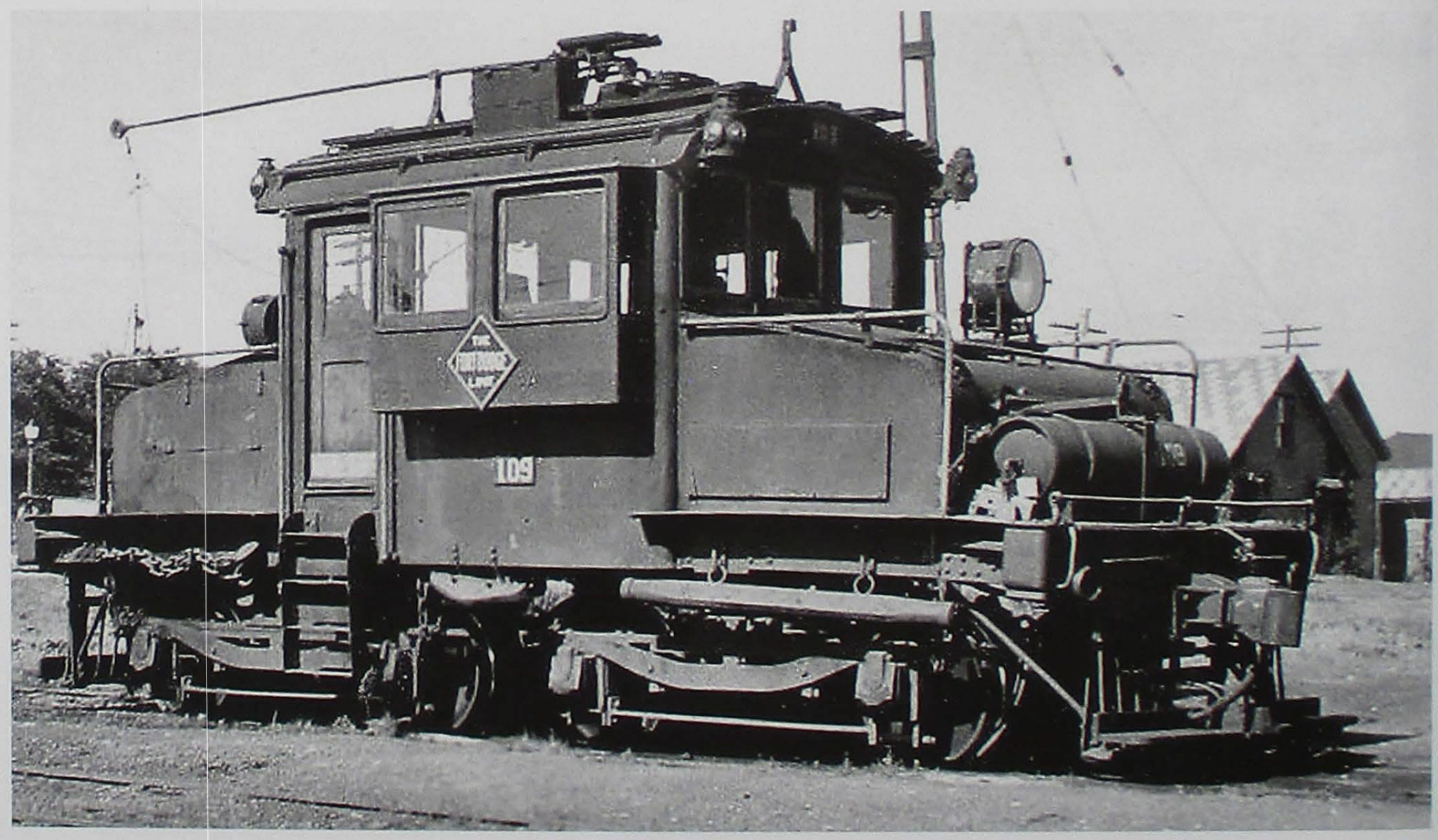
Above: FDL's first business car to carry the number 7 was obtained from the Wichita Falls & Southern R.R. whose name still appeared on the letterboard. The car rested at Boone in April 1951. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*



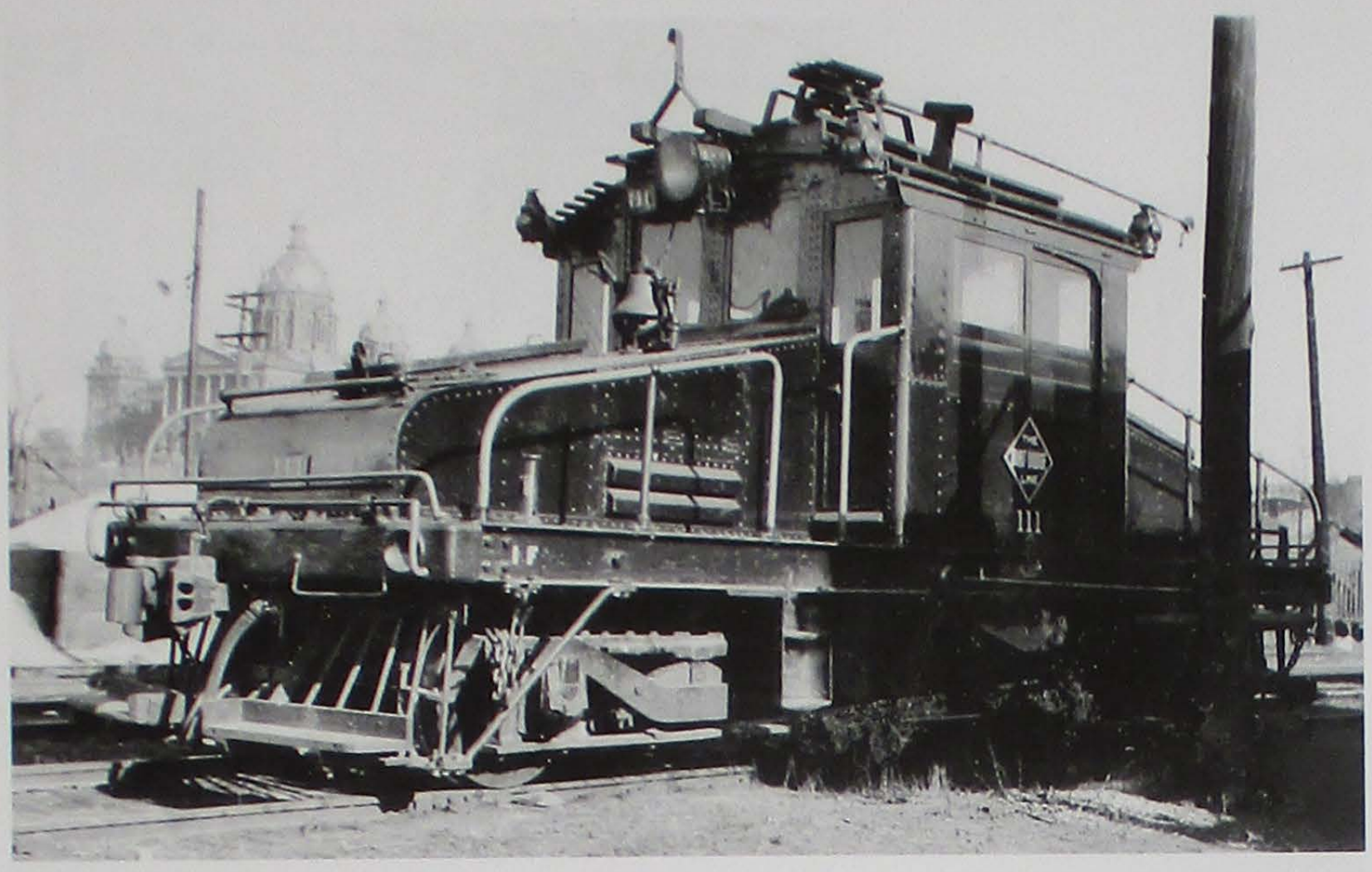
Above & Below: Line car 84 started its service life as one of the original box motors delivered to FDL in 1907. Top view shows the line car at Boone in its boxcar red days. Lower view finds it wearing FDL's canary yellow livery of later years. View at Boone dates from July, 26, 1953. *Raymond DeGroote photo*



Above & Below: When Fort Dodge Line began carload freight service it purchased two new 42 ½-ton steeplecab locomotives from Baldwin which arrived in 1909. Both units numbered 107 and 109 could be used for local switching or line hauls. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

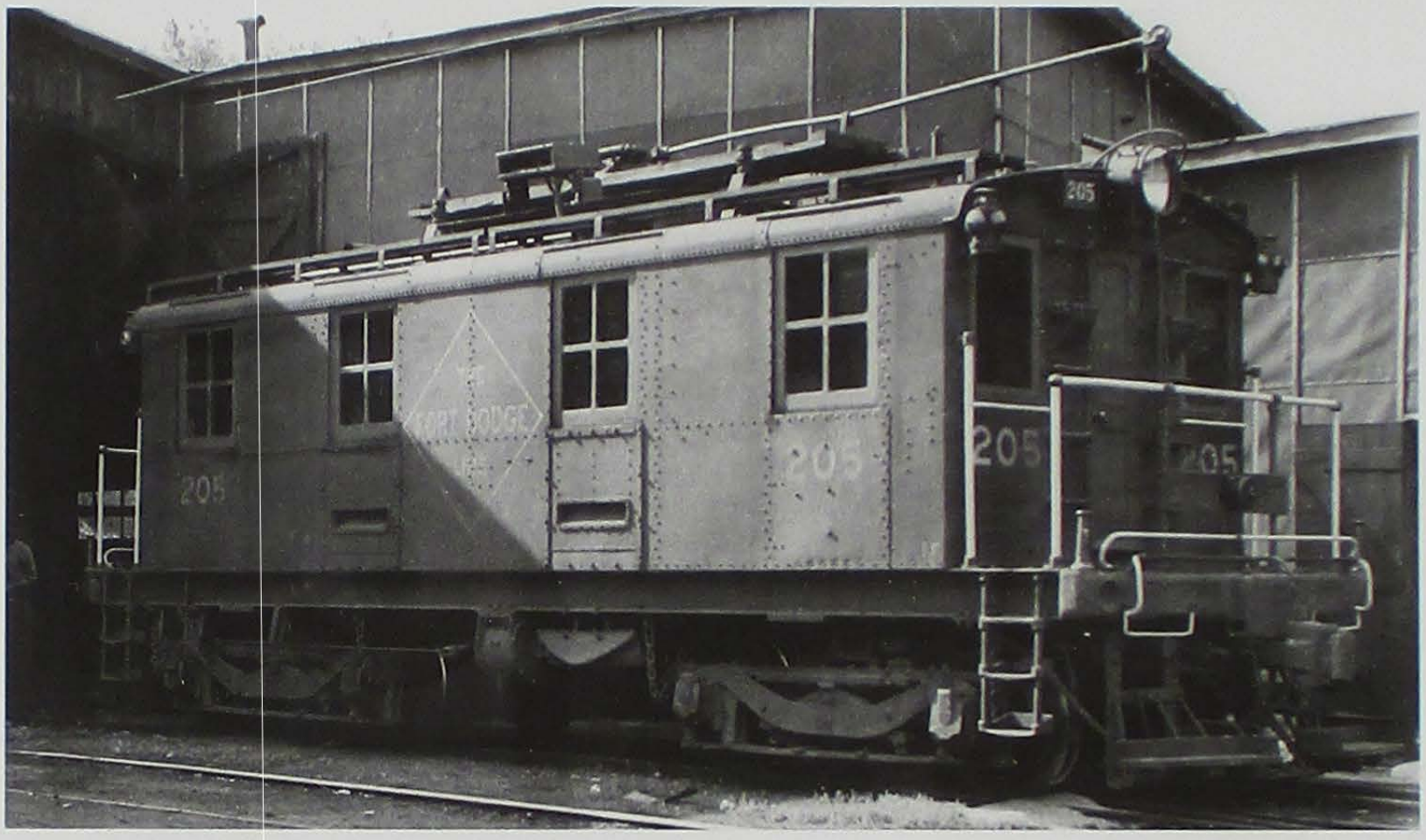


Right: Five more locomotives—111, 113, 115, 117, 119—were built by General Electric in 1911 and 1912. At 40 tons these were the lightest locomotives on FDL's roster, but they ably performed in mainline service over the years. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*



Middle Right & Bottom: Brand new locomotives 115 and 119 pose for their portraits shortly after completion. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Left: Locomotives 201 and 203 weighed in at 70 tons each and were the heaviest steeplecabs on the Fort Dodge Line. They were 1912 GE products. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*



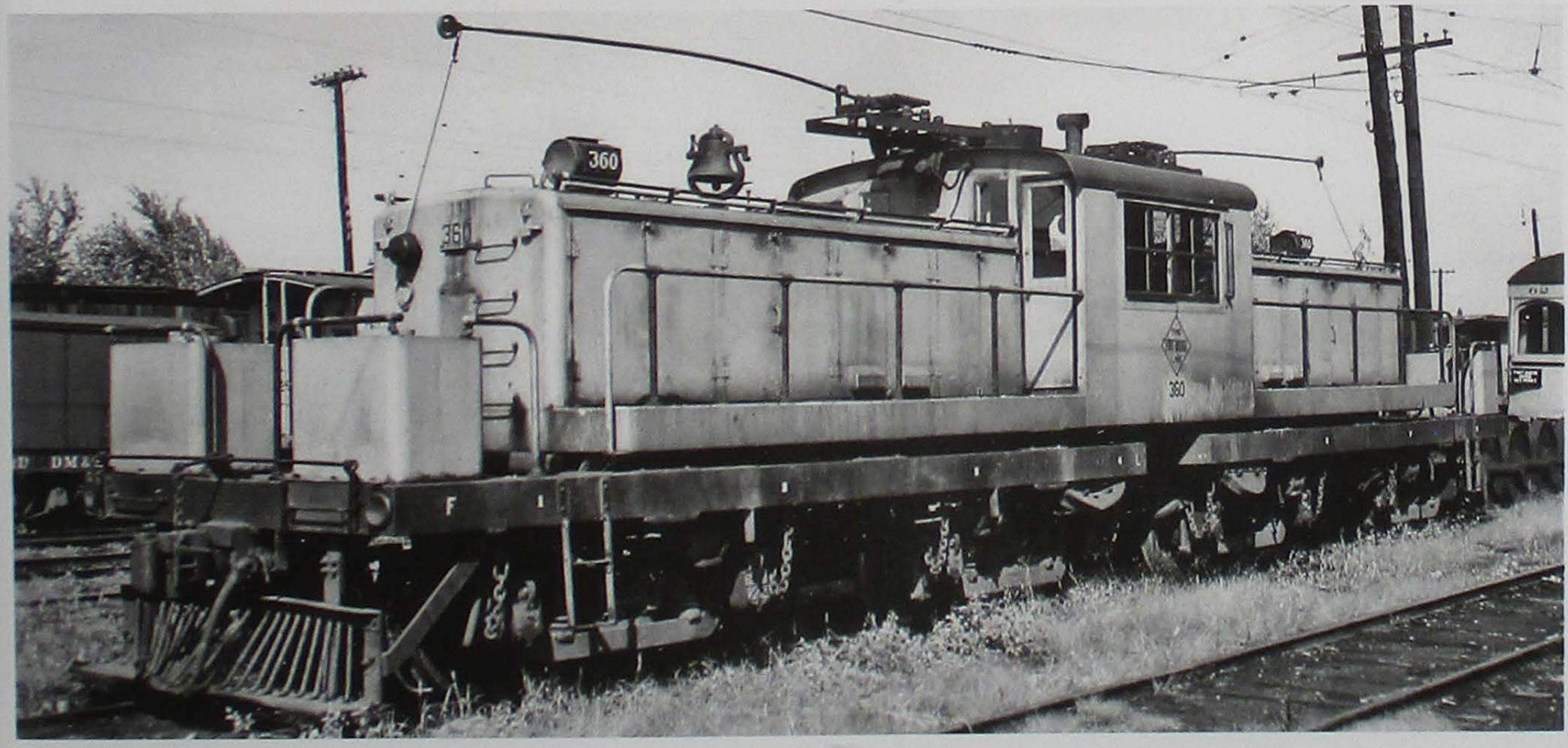
Left: Built by GE in 1916, locomotive 205 has a squat brutish look to it. Weighing in at 60 tons, 205 gave decades of reliable service on Fort Dodge Line freight trains. *Norman Carlson collection*

Below: Sister unit was switching cars near Fort Dodge in May 1951. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Right: Fort Dodge Line no. 208 was purchased in 1950 from the Iowa Transfer Railway in Des Moines where it had employed a pantograph for current collection. The 60-ton motor had been built in 1914 by McGuire-Cummings. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Right: GE-built 209 was the last locomotive purchased new (in 1929) by the Fort Dodge Line. The locomotive rests at the Des Moines yard on February 9, 1937. Passenger cars still continued beyond this point onto street trackage. Note single casting of truck side frame and end sill. *William C. Janssen photo; Norman Carlson collection*

Below: Fort Dodge Line freight trains were growing longer requiring locomotives with more weight and tractive effort. The solution was found with the 1947 acquisition of three ex-Oregon Electric locomotives which became the line's 360 series. These were the heaviest electric locomotives to run over FDL and they could easily manage long trains up grades in excess of 2%. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*



Above: Fort Dodge Line's 362 (former Oregon Electric 62) is ready for a northbound freight as it lays over at the railroad's Des Moines terminal located at 7th and Court. Photo date was December 17, 1952. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Full dieselization began in earnest following the disastrous flood of June 1954. FDL began acquiring a small fleet of GE 70-tonners similar to this Des Moines & Central Iowa diesel (which by this time was the legal owner of the FtDDM&S stock). DMCI 600 was working the Iowa Transfer Yard on June 7, 1967. In a little over a year, FtDDM&S and DMCI would become part of the Chicago and North Western and lose their identities. *Tom Nixon photo; Chicago & North Western Historical Society collection*

Chicago & North Western Ry

Ames

streetcar line 1907–1929

Transportation Bldg

steam dummy line 1890–1907

heating plant

Chicago & North Western Ry

Grand Ave

Clark Ave

steam dummy line 1890–1907

streetcar line 1907–1929

power plant

C&NW Depot

Iowa State College

Lincoln Way

U.S. 30

station

Duff

Knapp St.

Chicago & North Western Ry

N

0 1/4 1/2

MILES

Des Moines River

High Bridge

Ft Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Ry.

Boone Suburban Electric Ry.

street railways

N

2000 FT

Story St

Boone

car shop

freight house

depot

office

car shop

11th St

Argo St

Logansport

Boone Suburban Electric Railway

Chicago & North Western Ry

State St

Marion St

5th St

3rd St

Division St

Greene St

8th St

Tama St

5th St

Chicago & North Western Ry

Delaware St

line abandoned 1930

Chicago & North Western Ry

C.M.St.P.&P. R.R.

Des Moines

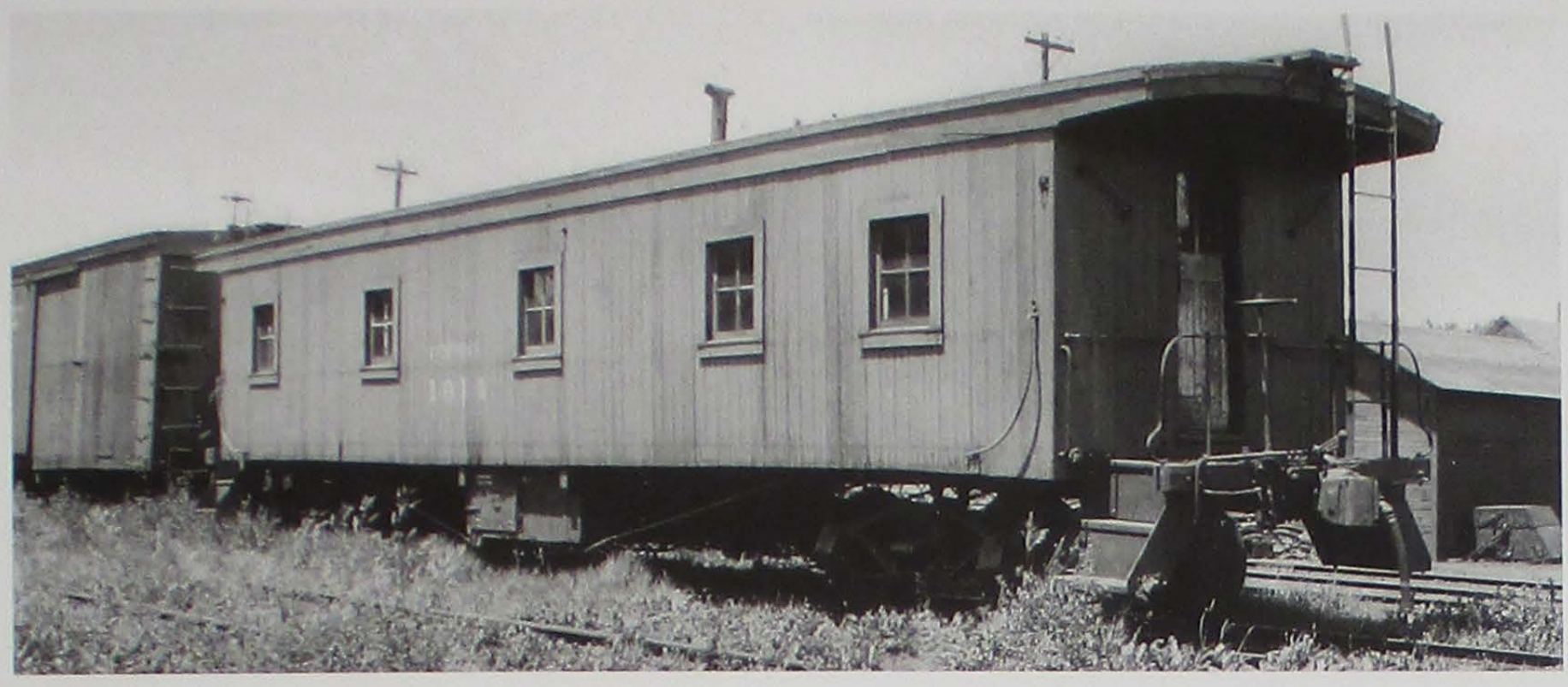
Ft Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Ry.
Des Moines & Central Iowa RR
street railways

N

0 1/2 1 MILES

Des Moines & Central Iowa RR
Urbandale Ave
Hickman Rd
Harding Rd
Franklin Ave
34th St
Clark St
University Ave
24th St
Cottage Grove Ave
17th St
13th St
9th St
6th St
Crocker St
31st St
Center St
25th St
19th St
Woodland Ave
Ingersoll Ave
Grand Ave
11th St
Euclid Ave
Cornell St
2nd Ave
Hull Ave
UNION PARK
Des Moines River
14th St
9th St
6th St
depot
Market St
SE 4th St
7th St
6th St
SW 7th St
Raccoon River
Edison Ave
Hartford Ave
SE 6th St
C&NW RR
CB&Q RR
CRI&P RR/M&StL RR
CM&StP&P RR
GREEN-
WOOD
PARK
CRI&P RR
C&NW RR
CGW RR
Des Moines & Central Iowa RR
Ft Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway
Easton Blvd
E University Ave
Walker St
Grand Ave
State Capitol
Court St
Walnut St
Scott St
SE 20th St
Maury St
CB&Q RR
Wabash RR
CRI&P RR
Des Moines River
GRAND-
VIEW
PARK
E 33rd St
SE 30th St
STATE FAIRGROUNDS

Every mainline freight train required a caboose in this era. Fort Dodge Line fielded an eclectic assortment to meet its needs.



Right: No. 1914 provided more caboose than was probably needed in this 1940s view. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

Right: FDL did own one caboose with a cupola, but the majority of the fleet resembled No. 088. *Bushnell-Krisak Photo Archive*

Right: What a difference a fresh coat of paint makes. Caboose 90 has been completely repainted and refurbished with new metal window frames. Tom Nixon photographed the scene at Boone on October 26, 1966. *Tom Nixon photo; Chicago & North Western Historical Society collection*

The Colorful Fort Dodge Line

Above: FDL was always amenable to special excursions. The event was CERA's first inspection trip over FDL on July 13, 1940. *Frank E. Butts photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: Crews obligingly posed cars at photogenic locations in a scene from the same fantrip. *Frank E. Butts photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: Picturesque Lehigh was at the end of a freight-only FDL branch. July 13, 1940. *Frank E. Butts photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Car 62 was a favorite for excursionists. Near Lehigh; November 3, 1951. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Left: A fantrip over the freight-only Rockwell City branch crossed the CGW at Rinard on the same day. *B. L. Stone photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: After the awful flood of 1954, FDL operated only one curiously configured turn over the 86-mile main route from Fort Dodge to Des Moines. Car 66 makes a call at Ankeny on August 20, 1955. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Right: Rockwell City, served also by Illinois Central and Milwaukee Road, was FDL's end point on a branch up from Hope. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: The up car from Des Moines arrived at Fort Dodge at 9:50 a.m. and in 1953 could slumber next to the depot until reawakened to return to Des Moines at 4:10 p.m. That routine accounted for half of the daily offering. July 20, 1953. *Raymond DeGroote photo*

Below: There were ample favorable locations along FDL's route for intrepid photographers. May 12, 1951. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Iowa Chapter of NRHS sponsored a gala three-car movement over all FDL lines above Boone on July 26, 1953, seen here at Harcourt. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: Car 62 on a fantrip poses for a photo on FDL's cinder-ballasted right-of-way. May 5, 1951. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: Freight paid the bills. Motor 113 hard at work in 1951. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Car 62 trundled softly over the substantial steel bridge over the Des Moines River south of Fort Dodge. *Raymond DeGroote photo*

Below: The Des Moines River presented engineering problems for FDL. May 12, 1951. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Right: Substantial steel bridges were required on FDL's mainline above Boone. May 12, 1951. *Robert V. Mehlenbeck photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: NRHS Iowa Chapter's three-car excursion found itself northbound over the Des Moines River south of Fort Dodge on July 26, 1953. *Raymond DeGroote photo*

Above: The "high bridge"—always an attractive location. *Robert V. Mehlenbeck photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: FDL trimmed its regularly scheduled passenger operation to twin daily turns with the result that otherwise slumbering equipment was readily available for special trips. Car 62 on the" high bridge," November 3, 1951. *George Krambles photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: View from train approaching the yard at Boone, the nerve center of FDL. May 13, 1951. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Fort Dodge car 72, sans headlight, southbound at Boone on August 20, 1955. *William C. Janssen photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: A time honored tradition—express shipments toted aboard shortly before departure from Des Moines. *Raymond DeGroote photo*

Above: Activity at Boone was abundant on July 26, 1953, as NRHS Iowa Chapter's charter was ready to leave town. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Boone was FDL's headquarters city and locus of impressive activity. May 5, 1951. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: Car 66 lopes across the "high bridge" north of Boone on August 20, 1955, near the end of passenger operations. *William C. Janssen photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: Dedicated shopmen at Boone kept FDL's passenger equipment in good order. October 26, 1952. *Raymond DeGroote photo*

Above: Car 74 had the duty on May 5, 1951, as it approached Benton Street in Boone. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Spring arrived slowly in Boone on a May day in 1951. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Below: FDL crossed C&NW's busy Chicago-Council Bluffs mainline east of Boone—a favorite for photographers. September 1954. *John Stern photo; Raymond DeGroote collection*

Above: FDL had a substantial investment in the built environment at Kelley, 56 miles south of Fort Dodge, 30 miles above Des Moines, and a point of departure for the short branch up to Ames. *B.L. Stone photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: When Oregon Electric dieselized in 1947, FtDDM&S purchased three of its unusual husky 16-wheel, four-truck freighters and numbered them in the 360 series. July 26, 1953. *Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: The big former Oregon Electric freighters initially provided operational headaches until regeared, but then fully met their operational potential, handling twice the tonnage of older steeplecabs. *Raymond DeGroote photo*

Above: Car 66 at Des Moines on August 20, 1955, was ready to depart on its northbound sojourn. Regularly scheduled passenger service would end a few days later on August 31. *William C. Janssen photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Car 74 had the duty on May 5, 1951, as it approached Benton Street in Boone. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Freight locomotive 119, a GE/Alco-built 40-tonner, works a short consist on April 11, 1953. *Henry M. Stange photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive*

Above: Cars 74, 66, and 62 on the NRHS Iowa Chapter excursion, posed on the "high bridge" on Sunday, July 26, 1953. No. 62's greater width is evident when coupled with two of the regular Niles cars. *Raymond DeGroote photo*

ENDNOTES

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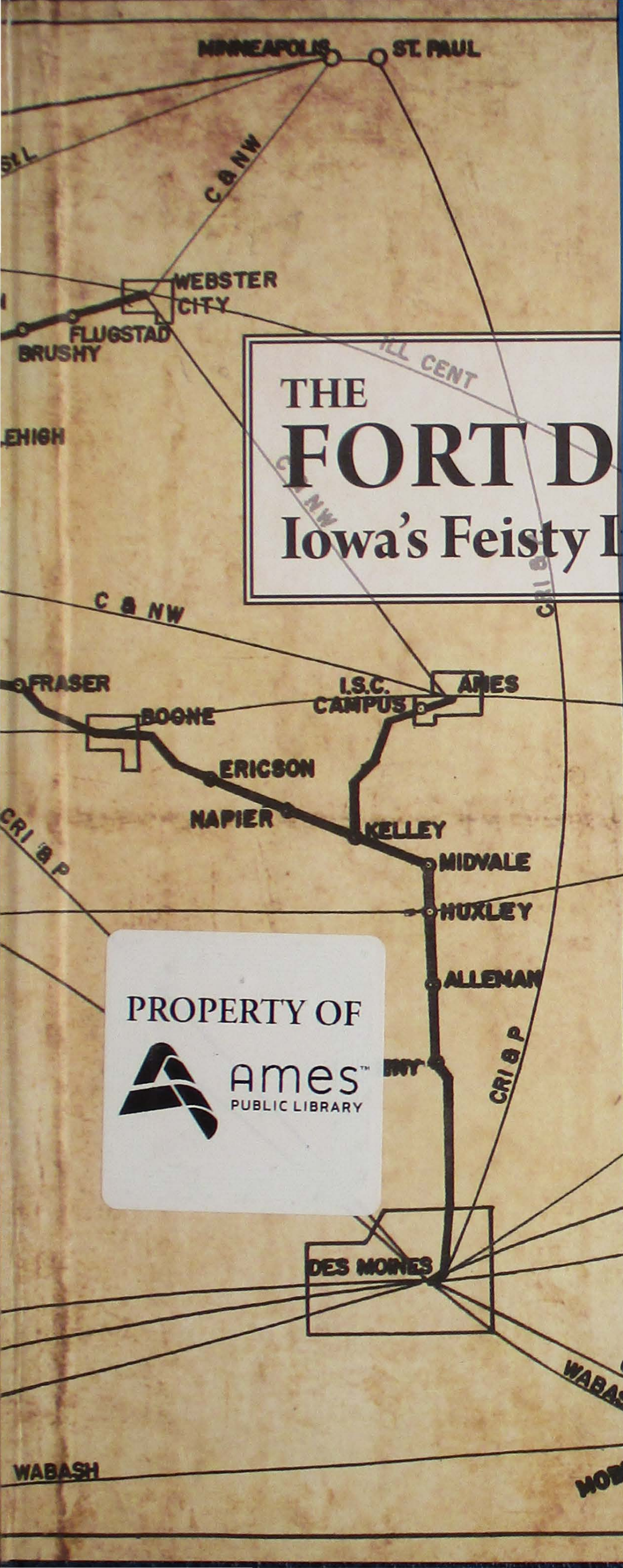

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Don Hofsommer presently lives in St. Cloud, Minnesota. This is his first book for CERA.

THE FORT DODGE LINE

No industry rose as rapidly and collapsed as quickly as the electric interurban industry in America. From a peak of over 16,000 miles, it was practically extinct by the mid-1930s. Only the Iowa Traction Company in Mason City, Iowa, and the South Shore Line running between Chicago and South Bend still operate. The interurban lines of Iowa differed from most of their counterparts as they were built to handle carload freight as well as providing electrically powered passenger service; the state unofficially came to be known as "the land of the steam road interurbans." While most Midwest interurban lines had become weed-grown abandoned rights-of-way, many Iowa interurbans continued to carry freight and passengers well into the 1950s.

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